

# Exploring the rehabilitative role of the prison library: addressing sensitive information needs via cultural activities.

## Abstract

This chapter explores the role of cultural activity within prison libraries for not only the general wellbeing of prisoners, but also as a form of indirect intervention for addressing unrecognised and/or unaddressed information needs amongst prisoners; particularly important needs of a more sensitive nature often repressed (e.g. remorse, mental health, relationships). Drawing on research to date, we discuss the information needs of prisoners, the associated benefits of cultural activity for information need recognition and understanding, and the support role of the prison library; and in relation, identify opportunities for further development of the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

## I. Introduction

Many countries worldwide, concerned with high recidivism rates, are placing increasing emphasis on the rehabilitative role of imprisonment (McArthur, 2014). Redondo *et al.*, in McGuire (2002), state that offending behaviour, like any other complex human behaviour, is learned through experience and watching others, and explain that rehabilitation seeks to employ learning mechanisms which reverse anti-social learned behaviours in order to teach and encourage new pro-social behaviours (p.117). However, a number of scholars note that formal rehabilitative interventions are often met by prisoner resistance and non-participation attributed to overly direct, critical, or confrontational approaches (McGuire, 2002; McNeill and Whyte, 2007; Patterson and Forgatch, 1985). Cultural activity offers an alternative approach. Turvey (2013) states that cultural activities, such as prison reading groups, offer prisoners the opportunity to engage in informal learning without the pressure of formal assessments or progress reports; and Hurry *et al.* (2014) reports that cultural interventions can be useful in engaging “hard-to-reach” prisoners, such as those who do not attend prison education (p.15), and notably, can “offer a pathway into engagement with more formal learning opportunities” (p.49). Outcomes of cultural activity in the prison context are also recognised as having intrinsic rehabilitative value, such as the development of soft skills (e.g. improved literacy, communication, and social skills) crucial to reintegration into society upon release (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). As such, engagement with cultural activities has the potential to support prisoners’ rehabilitation and act as a stepping stone to further engagement with formal learning programmes, with access to information and support via library services recognised as central to rehabilitation programmes (Learning & Work Institute, 2018; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Scottish Government, 2015).

However, in addition to issues of disengagement, and whilst effective methods of information access and support are widely recognised as central to rehabilitation programmes, many of the information needs of prisoners continue to be reported as unmet; particularly those of a *sensitive* nature (e.g. relating to remorse, mental health, and relationships) which may be difficult to address due to issues of recognition and/or fear of negative consequence (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Nacro, 2009). It is therefore important to explore potential avenues to support the meeting of sensitive information needs given that, if left unmet, they have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners’ ability to cope with imprisonment (Canning and Buchanan, 2018), and compound negative feelings (e.g. anger) which are fundamentally contrary to the rehabilitation process (Day, 2009). Again, this is where cultural activities may offer an appropriate method of intervention. Cultural activities designed to encourage recognition and discussion of difficult issues have been used in a variety of settings, such as bibliotherapeutic reading groups in the parole context (Umass Dartmouth, 2003a), and there is evidence that engagement with such activities may support individuals to

recognise sensitive needs by encouraging them to confront their problems and discuss them, even if indirectly, with other members of the group.

To ensure that sensitive information needs are not only recognised but also met, it is also essential that prisoners have access to the information needed to address such needs. The role of the prison library in providing information to help meet prisoners' information needs is well documented (Burt, 1977; Bajić 2015; Campbell, 2005; Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014; Sambo *et al.* 2017; Tarzaan *et al.* 2015), and a number of recent publications have attempted to draw greater attention to the prison library's often overlooked role in the rehabilitation process (Ings and Joslin, 2011; Šimunić *et al.* 2014; Zybert, 2011). The prison library is often the only specifically designated "cultural space" within the prison (Cramard, 2011, p.551), and importantly, can also provide a neutral atmosphere that can facilitate engagement with disengaged prisoners (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981). Like cultural activities in the prison context, the prison library is also viewed as having the potential to act as a bridge to formal learning programmes (Brosens *et al.*, 2014). As such, the prison library offers the ideal setting in which to engage with prisoners and to explore the potential for cultural activity to support prisoners with recognising and/or revealing sensitive information needs.

In consideration of above, this chapter explores potential avenues through which prisoners can be supported to recognise and address their sensitive information needs, by examining the information needs of prisoners and the impact of cultural activity in the prison context to identify associated benefits for information need recognition and understanding, and by investigating the potential support role of the prison library; and in relation, identifying opportunities for further development of the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

## II. The information needs of prisoners

The concept of information need is a much debated, and for some, problematic concept; but it is nonetheless generally recognised as a useful construct for understanding why people seek information, and is commonly regarded by information behaviour scholars as a context-sensitive secondary need triggered by primary physiological and/or psychological needs and associated feelings of uncertainty (Case and Given, 2016). While information seeking is generally viewed as the normative behavioural outcome of information need recognition, it is important to note that contextual factors influence needs and behaviours. Wilson (1996) proposes three factors which form context: personal (physiological and psychological); role (social and work); and environment (socio-economic); and that such factors act as intervening variables between determination of need and action, including stress/coping and risk/reward mechanisms. It is also important to note that information needs are not always recognised or understood in expressible terms. Taylor (1968) proposes four levels of cognition and expression of need:

*Q1—the actual, but unexpressed need for information (the visceral need);*

*Q2—the conscious, within-brain description of the need (the conscious need);*

*Q3—the formal statement of the need (the formalized need);*

*Q4—the question as presented to the information system (the compromised need).*

Taylor emphasizes that these four levels are not entirely distinct from each other, and instead "shade into one another along the question spectrum" (p.182). While the latter three levels indicate recognition of an information need (even if poorly understood), the *visceral* initial conception of an information need is only experienced by individuals as "a vague sort of dissatisfaction" (p.182). It is important to note that only once an information need has entered an individual's consciousness can they begin to take actions to resolve it. Therefore, the progression of an information need from 'visceral' to 'conscious' (i.e. recognised) is a crucial step if needs are to be met. A review of literature

suggests that information needs may remain unrecognised for a variety of reasons; e.g. because they are misunderstood or misinterpreted (Derr, 1983), they are deemed less important than other needs (Johnson *et al.* 2001), and/or they appear complex and overwhelming (Case, 2002).

To better understand prisoners' information needs and the extent to which these are met in the prison context, the following section presents a review of empirical studies which have examined the information needs and behaviours of prisoners, and given limited existing work, looks to prison library studies for further insight. Studies are discussed in chronological order.

#### *(a) Information need and behaviour studies in the prison context*

Stevens (1994) examined the information needs of US prisoners, drawing on a data collected from semi-structured interviews with 36 prisoners (age and sex unspecified) and 24 prison staff across three US prisons of varying security level. Stevens does not identify specific categories of need, but reports that prisoners' information needs are determined by length of sentence and time left to serve, and that the extent to which information needs are satisfied is dependent on the prison regime and perceived effectiveness of formal information channels (p.30). Stevens notes that prisoners themselves may be unable or unwilling to articulate their information needs for a variety of reasons, including: distrust towards prison authorities, the rapid institutionalization process, low motivation, and low expectations (p.31), and identifies a number of factors which negatively influence prisoners' information seeking, including: limited independent access to information; inconsistencies and arbitrariness of information provision, poor timing of information provision, lack of advice on how to utilise provided information, inadequate staff training and staff shortages, and prisoner hostility towards staff (p.32). Stevens concludes that, as a result of these issues "in some cases information needs were not addressed at all", adding that even when needs were met and prisoners were happy with the end result, they were often "dissatisfied with the process" (p.33). However, empirical evidence and discussion is limited due to the short report format of the published paper.

Chatman (1999) examined the information behaviours of US adult female prisoners through ethnographic research and interviews with 80 adult female prisoners from one US prison. Drawing upon Merton (1972)'s sociology of knowledge, Chatman (1999) reports that prisoners become integrated into the small world of the prison by means of a shift in their belief-system through specific adopted language and customs, transitioning from *outsiders* to *insiders*, whose values lie within the prison (p.208). Chatman uses several key concepts to describe aspects of small world living which influence the types of information shared and the types withheld; *social norms*, codes of behaviour which dictate what is normal and accepted and what is not; *social types*, characteristics which distinguish individuals from other groups; and *worldview*, a system of beliefs held by all members who live in the small world (p.213-214). Chatman explains that by becoming integrated into the small world of the prison, prisoners become part of 'life in the round' which she describes as "a public form of life in which things are implicitly understood" (p.212). Chatman concludes that life in the round ultimately has a negative impact on information seeking, as members will only cross the boundaries of their small world in order to seek out information if "(1) the information is perceived as critical, (2) there is a collective expectation that the information is relevant, and (3) a perception exists that the life in the round is no longer functioning" (p.214). Building on her earlier work on information poverty (Chatman, 1996), Chatman (1999) argues that the small world of the prison contributes to a state of information impoverishment amongst prisoners, with their needs remaining largely unaddressed due to social barriers (p.214). However, the study focuses primarily on information seeking behaviours (or lack thereof), with limited insight into the actual information needs of prisoners.

Nacro (2009) explored the information needs of UK female prisoners with mental health issues via focus groups and interviews with juvenile and adult female prisoners at two prisons in England (participant numbers unspecified). Findings of this study indicate that many prisoners require mental health support whilst serving a prison sentence, and some participants stated that other prisoners were the best source of support with regards to mental health issues, while others reported feeling

“scared” of revealing such needs to other prisoners; preferring to discuss such issues anonymously over the phone instead (p.9-10). The authors describe unmet information needs relating to healthcare and medication as “a huge source of anxiety” for female prisoners (p.12), and some participants expressed a dissatisfaction with waiting times for healthcare appointments which could impede their access to needed information (p.13). The report concludes, “From the discussions we had with the women, it was clear there is a lack of information available for women prisoners, and particularly those with mental health issues” (p.17), and highlights that unmet mental health needs may make reintegration into society more challenging for female prisoners following their release.

Rafedzi and Abrizah (2014) examined the information behaviours of young male Malaysian prisoners through qualitative interviews with 23 male juvenile prisoners (ages 13-21) housed in four Malaysian correctional schools. Key findings include the identification of common information needs, including those relating to prison operations, family, sex, health, recreation, legal support and academic studies (p.7). Participants often reported feeling “a sense of vulnerability” shortly after their imprisonment, attributed to “fearful representations of prison in popular culture” which lead to an increased need for “day-to-day information for security and mutual support” (p.7). Other prisoners were valued as a “crucial source of practical and emotional support” and other frequently utilised sources of information included friends, teachers, family, television and books (p.10). The majority of participants reported feeling reluctant to interact with prison officers due to the perception that this was not the “correct or preferred source to get any information” but without further explanation (p.11). Further studies are recommended.

Bajić (2015) examined the information needs and reading interests of Croatian prisoners by surveying 504 male and female prisoners (age and sex ratio unspecified) housed in six prisons of varying security level in Croatia. The most common information needs reported included rights in the prison, family, life after prison, employment, and prison rules, with less frequently reported needs relating to sports, life outside the prison, finance, health, law, education, and training (p.525). The information sources reported as most frequently used were family and friends, followed closely by prison officers. In relation, whilst approximately one third of prisoners reported asking other prisoners, consulting books/newspaper, or consulting their lawyer for information, less than 5% indicated that they would ask the prison librarian for information (p.525). When asked what barriers they faced when trying to access information, the majority of participants reported that the main issue was a lack of access to computers and the internet (p.526). Bajić draws no specific conclusions from findings but recommends that prison administrations utilise the data presented to improve prison library services to ensure that prisoners’ information needs are met (p.526).

Canning and Buchanan (2018) examined the information behaviour of UK prisoners by conducting interviews with 12 adult male prisoners and 6 members of prison staff at one maximum-security prison in Scotland. A number of prisoners’ information needs are identified, including those relating to education, health, prison routines, legal, finance, housing, and employment. More sensitive emotional needs linked to remorse, mental health, and relationships that are known to influence prisoners’ abilities to cope with imprisonment are also identified; however, the authors report that participants themselves often did not appear to fully recognise or reveal these needs, which were instead often alluded to or discussed only in relation to other prisoners. Findings suggest that male prisoners are particularly reluctant to reveal needs associated with weakness and vulnerability (e.g. mental health, relationships, etc.), supporting previous assertions that hypermasculine contexts inhibit the expression of “inferior” and “feminine” emotions (e.g. Mosher and Tomkins 1988, p.67). When seeking to meet needs, participants reported a preference for individual interpersonal sources considered non-judgemental and helpful, however, a number of factors negatively influenced interactions, including social and affective issues (e.g. distrust, fear of stigma, and low self-esteem), and complex access barriers connected to prison security and operations. In response to social and affective issues in particular, prisoners exhibited a range of self-protective behaviours, including secrecy and deception (supporting Chatman’s (1996; 1999) information poverty and small world

concepts), leaving many of their information needs unmet; particularly those of a sensitive nature relating to emotions and coping. Findings suggest that unmet sensitive information needs have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners' abilities to cope with imprisonment and take fundamental steps towards rehabilitation. As such, the authors argue that the meeting of such needs is crucial, and conclude (p.431):

*There is a need for further research exploring issues of unmet emotional needs in prisoners, and in particular, assistive methods of need recognition and support in the problematic at-risk context. Such research faces significant challenges, not least in addressing issues of self-recrimination and rehabilitation within an environment of restrictive social norms and personal constructs.*

*(b) Other relevant studies: prison libraries*

A 2008 study by Omagbemi and Adunewu which examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners appears to have been the catalyst for a number of related follow-on studies in Nigeria. Whilst focused on library service evaluation, these studies nonetheless offer some insight into the information needs of prisoners. Again, studies are discussed in chronological order.

Omagbemi and Adunewu (2008) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by surveying 62 prisoners aged <20 to 40+ (exact age range and sex unspecified) from four prisons in Nigeria. A range of information needs are identified, including those relating to news/current affairs, law, religion, psychology, recreation, vocation and education; with the most frequently reported needs relating to education and news/current affairs, and the least frequent relating to recreation and vocation (p.251-252). When surveyed on prison library services, 50% of participants reported that they felt prison library stock was inadequate to meet their needs (p.250-251). Notably, 70% of participants stated that they agreed information was important to the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners (p.251). The authors conclude by recommending that: professional library associations visit prison libraries to "enlighten" prisoners on the benefits of information; public libraries create outreach services to support prisoners following release, library personnel be given more "adequate" training, library collections be "improved" (no specific recommendations), and readership be promoted to prisoners (p.252-253).

Eze (2014) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by conducting focus groups with 1095 prisoners (age and sex unspecified), and surveying 21 prison library/welfare workers from five prisons in Nigeria. Eze reports that prisoners experience information needs similar to those of "free people", but only prisoners' legal and spiritual information needs appear to be met to some extent; with broader everyday information needs relating to education, vocation, recreation, health, and finance reported as inadequately met (p.251). While many of these needs are connected to education and self-development, recreational information was reported to help prisoners cope with loneliness and boredom, and spiritual information was felt to help prisoners "change for the better spiritually and emotionally" and support their rehabilitation (p.247). Similar to Omagbemi and Adunewu (2008), Eze concludes that the Nigerian prison service does not provide adequate library services to meet prisoners' information needs (p.251), but does not make any specific recommendations on how to improve services.

Tarzaan *et al.* (2015) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by surveying 90 prisoners (age and sex again unspecified) at one medium-security prison in Nigeria. Tarzaan *et al.* report that prisoners experience legal, health, religious, educational, recreational, and vocational information needs (p.196). A number of information sources with which prisoners interact are identified, including billboards/posters, television, lawyers, religious bodies, and prison wardens (p.196). Some insight is offered into factors which inhibit access to information in the prison context, including: high cost of information resources, high rates of illiteracy, lack of awareness

of information services, local-language issues, and lack of prison library or other information service (p.196). Again (similar to previous studies above), Tarzaan *et al.* conclude that prisoners' information needs are often unmet, and recommend that the Nigerian government dedicate funds to the development of prison libraries in Nigeria (p.198).

Emasealu and Popoola (2016) examined the role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of prisoners by surveying 335 male and 39 female prisoners (ages unspecified) and conducting focus groups (participant numbers and demographics not provided) at two prisons in Nigeria. Emasealu and Popoola report that prisoners have information needs relating to legal aid, continuing education, professional development, finance, health, and survival and coping with prison (p.10). Participants reported that many library resources were difficult to access (p.11), and often in poor condition, outdated, or irrelevant to prisoners' actual information needs (p.13). Emasealu and Popoola conclude that a large proportion of prisoners' information needs are currently unmet by prison libraries in Nigeria, and recommend additional funding to support prison educational programmes and provide the information resources necessary to meet prisoners' needs.

Sambo *et al.* (2017) examined that role of Nigerian prison libraries in meeting the information needs of the prisoners by surveying 720 male and 41 female prisoners (ages unspecified) and conducting interviews (participant numbers and demographics not provided) from four prisons in Nigeria. Results include identification of a number of information needs, including those relating to health, finance, spiritualism, post-release information, law, family/friends, education, human rights, and prison rules (p.10). Prison library services were generally perceived as inadequate by participants, with the majority addressing their needs instead through religious bodies, family or friends, or health professionals (p.11). A number of factors which prevented needs being addressed were identified, including: lack of library/prison funding, time restrictions, censorship, lack of professional staff, and poor staff training (p.12). Similar to previous studies discussed above, the authors conclude that Nigerian prison libraries do not meet the information needs of prisoners.

### *Discussion and summary*

From this review of the literature, a number of broad themes emerge. First, that prisoners have information needs which are largely similar to those of the general public (e.g. spanning topics of education, healthcare, finance, housing, law, recreation, etc.), but that prisoners also have specific needs relating to everyday prison life including important emotional and coping needs (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Nacro, 2009; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014). Second, whilst a range of information sources exist within the prison environment, the majority of prisoners exhibit a preference for interpersonal sources of information, often attributed to the inaccessibility of information in other formats. In relation, limited prison library services and resources are also reported (Bajić, 2015; Eze, 2014; Omagbemi and Odunewu, 2008; Tarzaan *et al.* 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo *et al.* 2017). Third, there is evidence of complex external access barriers and internalised behavioural barriers which impact upon the meeting of prisoners' information needs; the former influenced by custodial policy and controls, the latter by restrictive social structures and norms, and issues of trust (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Stevens, 1994). Overall, evidence suggests that many prisoners live their lives in information-impooverished states, with many of their needs unmet.

In particular there is evidence of unmet sensitive needs relating to managing emotions, relationships, and mental health (Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Chatman, 1999; Nacro, 2009). Canning and Buchanan (2018) present evidence of sensitive needs in their study of the information behaviours of maximum-security adult male prisoners, and note that such needs were often alluded to in discussions but not acknowledged outright by participants. This was partially attributed to the restrictive social environment of the prison, but also the possibility that such needs were "not yet fully formed or understood as information needs" by participants (p.429). Canning and Buchanan (2018) argue that unmet sensitive needs have the potential to negatively impact upon prisoners' abilities to cope with

imprisonment and to take fundamental steps towards rehabilitation, and this is supported by reports that repressed and/or unmet emotional needs are linked with aggression during incarceration (e.g. Robertson *et al.*, 2014, 2015; Velotti *et al.*, 2017) and unsuccessful rehabilitation (e.g. Day, 2009). As such, is it crucial to identify effective methods of intervention to support prisoners in recognising and addressing such needs.

In summary, there are limited studies examining the information needs of prisoners, and in relation, limitations to several of those that have been conducted, including: unspecified participant demographics (e.g. age and sex), a lack of methodological detail (e.g. unspecified sample sizes for interviews/focus groups), limited empirical evidence, and a library service orientation that provides limited insight into the broader everyday needs of prisoners. In addition, despite often identifying issues of unmet need in prisoners, few studies provide guidance on potential interventions which might help prisoners address their needs, with several providing general recommendations to improve prison library services, but without specific guidance as to how this might be achieved (Bajić, 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Omagbemi and Odunewu, 2008; Sambo *et al.* 2017; Tarzaan *et al.* 2015). Therefore, to address this important knowledge gap, and with particular attention to unrecognised and/or unaddressed sensitive information needs, the next section explores the role of cultural activity in the prison context.

### **III. Cultural activity in the prison context**

Similar to information need, culture can also be a problematic concept to define, with interpretations from various fields presenting conflicting views; for example, culture as *artistic and intellectual endeavours* through an aesthetic perspective (Arnold, 1867), or culture as the *marked characteristics* (i.e. behaviours, beliefs, and symbols) of a specific social group through an anthropological perspective (Boas, 1904). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) present a more holistic overview, explaining that culture can be understood as a concept which describes specific human behaviours (e.g. traditions) and embodied objects (e.g. artwork) in terms of their significance to particular social groups. Cultural activities are viewed as “sports or activities which contribute to or enhance the aesthetic, artistic, historical, intellectual or social development or appreciation of members of the general public” (Law Insider, 2020). There is evidence that cultural activity can support prisoner rehabilitation by contributing to the development of soft skills which support prisoners’ rehabilitation and desistance from crime including improved literacy, communication, and social skills (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). There is also evidence that engagement with cultural activity can encourage prisoners to become more self-reflective individuals, leading to better self-understanding, and an increased capacity to empathise with others, all important aspects of the rehabilitation process (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016, p.7).

To explore the impact of cultural activity in the prison context and the rehabilitative value of associated outcomes, the following section presents a review of studies which evaluate the impact of cultural activities in the prison context; including an overview of activities being evaluated, data collection methods, participant demographic details (when provided), and key findings. This section focuses primarily on empirical studies which include adult male prisoners given reports that this demographic group faces specific challenges in addressing sensitive information needs (e.g. those relating to remorse, relationships, and mental health). There is also a focus on studies in the UK context given the substantial variation in function and design of prisons worldwide. However, where additional insight can be obtained from studies involving other sample groups (i.e. female and juvenile prisoners) and geographic locations (i.e. outside of the UK), these are incorporated into discussion. Again, studies are discussed in chronological order.

Anderson *et al.* (2011) evaluated the impact of a programme of drama, playwriting, singing, and visual arts activities designed to “stimulate offenders’ engagement with learning, improve literacy skills, and demonstrate the potential of the arts to support the process of rehabilitation” (p.3). This programme involved seven national cultural organisations and took place in five Scottish prisons. Data collection methods were mixed, including 26 focus groups with prisoners (mixed age and sex), interviews with 27 prison staff and 15 arts organisation staff, case studies, feedback forms and prisoner surveys. Broad findings suggest that engagement with cultural activities has the potential to improve prisoners’ relationships with family, peers, and the wider prison community (including staff), increase prisoners’ self-esteem (contributing to sustained physical and mental benefits), and contribute to the development of soft skills crucial to the rehabilitation process (e.g. literacy, communication, and social skills). The authors propose that arts-based interventions support the rehabilitation process by encouraging prisoners to think differently and more positively about themselves, and “to ‘imagine’ different possible futures, different social networks, different identities and different lifestyles” (p.40). Specific findings regarding one project involving adult male prisoners run by the Scottish Opera and Scottish Chamber Orchestra indicate that participants felt they could better express themselves and express wider range of emotions following their participation, and this was attributed to the opportunity to communicate and interact with other participants during the project (p.50).

Browne and Rhodes (2011) evaluated the impact of the ‘Fine Cell Work’ needlework programme in five prisons in England by conducting group and individual interviews with 22 male and female adult prisoners (exact number of participants by sex/interview type not provided). This project provided prisoners with training in paid, skilled, and creative needlework that was completed during lockdown time. Participants reported development of their practical skills, feeling better able to take financial responsibility, improvements to their mental health and family relationships, and some reported that, beyond earning extra money, they felt the desire to “give something back” and the project enabled them to do so. The needlework also reportedly offered participants a distraction from the stress and anxiety associated with the isolation of lockdown, and acted as a “catalyst for reflection” (p.4). However, given the individual nature of this activity (carried out while alone in cells at night), whilst most prisoners reported that they felt “part of something”, the strength of this attachment varied amongst participants (p.10).

Bilby *et al.* (2013) produced a report which presents overlapping findings from a number of arts-based interventions in English prisons. Evaluating one music project run by Music in Prisons, interviews were conducted with 7 adult male prisoner participants and 2 members of prison staff. This week-long project involved participants learning to play instruments, compose music, and ended with a live performance. Findings included improved social skills, increased confidence and self-esteem which helped build positive self-image, as well as participants feeling encouraged to reflect on themselves. Bilby *et al.* concluded that engagement with cultural activity in the prison context has the potential to lead to positive behavioural change as a result of prisoners reflecting upon themselves; thereby, also potentially supporting their rehabilitation (p.50):

*The findings clearly demonstrate how the arts activities undertaken by participants provided the medium through which they were able to reflect upon their own self. In this sense, the art facilitated reflection, leading to changes in self-perception, and potentially changes in behaviour.*

Further evidence of the propensity for cultural activities to encourage introspective reflection is seen in Billington’s (2011) evaluation of the ‘Get into Reading’ project in one male and two female prisons in England. This project consisted of fortnightly reading groups which involved prisoners reading aloud and listening to others read, as well as general book discussion. Findings, drawn from specific examples and testimony from participants and group facilitators (e.g. health professionals), demonstrates how participants felt encouraged to “think about other people’s perspectives” (p.58)

while also being supported to recognise “new possibilities for the self” (p.73); outcomes which are fundamental to the rehabilitation process (Schuller, 2009). Building upon this study, Billington and Robinson (2012) conducted a more thorough evaluation of the ‘Get into Reading’ project with adult female prisoners at one prison in England. While findings of this study are derived solely from qualitative interviews with an unspecified number of prison staff involved in the project (thereby not necessarily reflecting the view of prisoner participants), they offer further valuable insight into the impact of cultural activity in the prison context. For example, staff reported improvements in prisoners’ social skills (attributed to discussions and sharing humour which strengthened relationships and increased self-confidence), and improvements to prisoners’ psychological and emotional wellbeing (attributed to their ability to ‘escape’ the reality of imprisonment and feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness). There is also further evidence of the potential for reading groups to trigger self-reflection and encourage readers to empathise with other viewpoints, which might help prisoners to better understand the impact of their past criminal behaviour on others (e.g. victims, family members, and witnesses). For example, one member of staff made the following observation (p.5):

*There were repeated instances of the literature spontaneously eliciting specific and vivid autobiographical memory of moments of recognition, as well as of the reading activity encouraging a capacity (sometimes demonstrably progressive) for understanding personal and imagined experience from a range of viewpoints.*

Further insight into the potential for cultural activity to encourage self-reflection among participants is provided by Turvey (2013), who examined the Prison Reading Groups (PRG) project; which from 1999 to 2013 had run reading groups in twenty-four male prisons, four female prisons, and three community groups in England. This report presents extensive qualitative evidence drawn from prisoner interviews, reports and surveys, and identifies a number of benefits that reading groups offer prisoners, including: the ability to empathise with the lives of others, to engage in critical self-reflection, and to feel connected to a wider culture beyond prison. Findings also suggest that reading groups (which aim to foster a love of reading, with learning a secondary aspect) may help to engage prisoners who are normally disengaged with more formal learning opportunities in the prison context. Alluding to the rehabilitative role of reading groups, Turvey explains that reading contributes to the development of soft skills necessary for employment (i.e. communication, articulacy, and decision-making). In addition to human, social, and identity forms of capital, Turvey (2013) argues that reading groups help individuals to develop a fourth form of capital which she describes as ‘imaginative capital’ (p.31):

*Why is imaginative capital important? It matters because it concerns the growth of the self: reflection and thinking, crucially about other situations and other people. This is often what prisoners need to do. An invitation to invest in imaginative capital proposes that I might be able to understand my own situation better by reading about someone else’s.*

Turvey (2013) presents evidence of this development of imaginative capital in her study, presenting quotes from reading group participants who identified with fictional characters due to similarities between their own behaviours and that of the characters. For example, one study participant commented (p.37):

*It’s a great book and I recognised so much of it since I have mental health issues of my own, especially OCD. I had to stop and work out all the maths and spent more time on that than reading the rest. But I think that’s what Christopher [fictional character in the book] would have done too.*

This process through which individuals come to identify with a fictional character is described as 'identification' or 'mimesis' (Andringa, 2004; Pavel, 2000; Schaeffer, 1999). Stevens and Usherwood (1995) argue that reading fiction allows prisoners to compare their own behaviour to that of fictional characters, thus supporting them to review problematic behaviours and develop the skills necessary to plan for and cope with imagined "crisis" situations (p.59). Findings suggest that building imaginative capital may help prisoners to identify the problematic thoughts and behaviours which led to their past criminal behaviour, whilst also allowing them to better appreciate the negative consequences of such actions upon others; steps which McGuire (2002) argues are crucial to the successful rehabilitation of prisoners.

Hurry *et al.* (2014) evaluated creative writing workshops ran by the 'Geese Theatre Company' in 28 prisons in England and Wales. Methods were mixed and included observation of workshops, and the surveying of 185 male and female prisoners of mixed age (sex ratio unspecified). Participants reported an increase in self-confidence and self-awareness, the development of a positive sense of identity as 'writer' and not just as a 'prisoner', and improvements to their literacy skills. Other findings of note included participants' responses to particular questions following their engagement; for example, 81% stated that the workshop had made them think about themselves, 83% stated that the workshop had made them feel like expressing themselves, and 46% had thought about things that were bothering them as a result of their participation (p.21). Therefore, once again we see evidence that engagement with cultural activity encourages self-reflection and self-expression. Findings also suggest that cultural activities can help prisoners to confront difficult issues. Hurry *et al.* also highlight the value of cultural activities for engaging 'hard to reach' prisoners, such as those not attending formal education programmes, proposing that, "Creative workshops can offer a pathway into engagement with more formal learning opportunities" (p.49).

Looking outside of the UK prison context, there are examples of cultural projects specifically designed and aimed at encouraging recognition and discussion of difficult and personal issues in the wider hypermasculine context of crime. For example, the 'Changing Lives Through Literature' (CLTL) programme has operated in a number of US states since the early 1990s, offering reading groups to men and women recently released from prison who are considered at high-risk of reoffending. This programme is based on the principle that "bringing carefully selected works of literature to criminal offenders may help these men and women gain insight into their lives and behaviour, while learning that they are not alone with their problems" (Umass Dartmouth, 2003a, n.p.). To achieve this, literature is selected to reflect the "underlying issues" participants themselves might be experiencing (Umass Dartmouth, 2003b, n.p.). For example, in men's groups, literature and discussion has focused on themes "such as violence, masculinity and individual identity" (Jarjoura and Krumholz, 1998). The programme states that it offers participants "safety" by allowing them to explore their own experiences through discussing fictional characters and narratives with the group, as opposed to formally confronting or revealing their personal problems (Umass Dartmouth, 2003c, n.p.). Insight into the benefits of engagement is provided by testimonials from participants of the men's CLTL Dorchester programme, which include statements such as, "I liked the opportunity I got to express my feelings... I learned a little more about myself from it", and "The course has made me reflect on the things I have done in life, some of the mistakes I have made" (Umass Dartmouth, 2003d, n.p.). These statements suggest that participants obtained insight into their lives and behaviours as a result of their engagement. In addition, there is evidence that participants also learned that they were not alone with their problems; for example, one participant explained that reading about a fictional character going through and overcoming a difficult situation similar to his own offered him "a sort of comfort, knowing this ordeal can be overcome, and also knowing I'm not the only one who has to face such problems" (Umass Dartmouth, 2003d, n.p.).

### *Discussion and summary*

From this review of the literature, a number of benefits of prisoner engagement with cultural activity are evident. There is evidence that cultural activities can effectively engage difficult to reach prisoners who are often reluctant to attend formal learning programmes (Hurry *et al.* 2014; Turvey, 2013). There is also evidence that engagement with cultural activity can support the rehabilitation process by helping prisoners develop their literacy, social, and communication skills (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Bilby *et al.* 2013; Turvey, 2013). There is also evidence that cultural activities can help prisoners deal with difficult issues, such as their mental health, by offering the opportunity to distract themselves from reality during difficult times (Billington and Robinson, 2012; Browne and Rhodes, 2011), and can encourage prisoners to confront their problems (Hurry *et al.* 2014), and to think differently about themselves, contributing to a more positive sense of self-identify (Anderson *et al.* 2011). A recurrent theme throughout is the fostering of self- reflection (e.g. Bilby *et al.* 2013; Billington and Robinson, 2012; Browne and Rhodes, 2011; Turvey, 2013). For example, Bilby *et al.* (2013) discuss cultural activity as a medium through which prisoners can “reflect upon their own self” (2013, p.50). The intrinsic rehabilitative value of such self-reflection is also reported. For example, Crossick and Kaszynska (2016, p.57) note:

*At the heart of desistance from offending is an ability to think about oneself and others, to see genuine choices and options, and to imagine other life circumstances and other possible futures. Arts engagement in prisons has been shown to make a serious contribution to these processes [...]*

However, whilst many studies acknowledge the potential for cultural activity to foster self-reflection amongst participants, this is often discussed in relation to the general rehabilitation process, with limited consideration of (post cultural activity) next steps. This issue is often compounded by many cultural activities being delivered by external agencies over a fixed (often short) time period. In particular (for our purposes), whilst the propensity for cultural activities to encourage self-expression and confrontation of problematic issues is recognised, there is limited insight into how this influences prisoner recognition of information needs, and their willingness to articulate and address their needs, particularly those of a sensitive nature. Further, whilst it is possible that new needs may arise as a result of this self-reflection, they may not be actioned because they are misunderstood or misinterpreted (Derr, 1983), deemed less important than others (Johnson *et al.* 2001), or complex and overwhelming (Case, 2002). As such, further research into when and where reflection occurs during cultural engagement and the subsequent impact of this upon information need recognition is required.

Despite often being delivered in group settings, the benefits for self-understanding resulting from cultural engagement may support prisoners to recognise sensitive information needs privately, without the need to formally articulate them to others. Evidence of this can be seen in Billington and Robinson’s (2012) finding that reading activities have the potential to trigger “autobiographical” moments of recognition (p.5); a term which suggests that this can be an independent process, as opposed to one which must be facilitated through interactions with others. Evidence also suggests that engagement with cultural activity encourages self-expression among participants (Anderson *et al.* 2011; Hurry *et al.* 2014), that might also encourage prisoners to articulate *sensitive* information needs to others. However further research of an empirical nature is required to investigate such behaviours (or lack thereof). Further research into enduring issues of access is also required. In the 1960s Goffman (1961) reported that whilst access to cultural activities was relatively unrestricted for members of society, such activities were much more restricted for prisoners and formed “an important derivational effect” of prison life (p.67-68). Fast-forwarding to current times, Thorpe (2015, 2017) has recently reported that there is room to expand upon the current level of cultural and arts activities available in Scottish prisons, and that such activities are justified given the benefits to prisoners’ rehabilitation and general wellbeing. Further broader investigation is recommended.

In summary, engagement with cultural activity in the prison context, beyond recreational and creative purposes, can also be viewed as the beginning of a journey, with initial engagement activities encouraging prisoners to reflect upon themselves and to come to terms with their imprisonment. This process can trigger self-awareness and self-reflection, and the potential for self-improvement; important aspects of the rehabilitation process. It is also noted that cultural activities can be useful in engaging prisoners who are normally disengaged with formal learning programmes, but this is not always the case. Burt (1977) argues that prisoner disengagement may extend from formal programmes to also include non-formal interventions because “There is a tendency for inmates to suspect ulterior motives when new programs, etc., are initiated because the inmates feel vulnerable” (p.32). Bilby *et al.* (2013) also point out that in order for prisoners to fully benefit from their participation in cultural activities, participants must view the location in which such activity occurs as a “safe environment” (p.55). As such, cultural activities in the prison context may be subject to similar issues of prisoner disengagement if they are not delivered in a suitable setting. There is also the important question of what happens following recognition of sensitive information needs, as it is not only important for prisoners to be supported in recognising their needs, but also in addressing them. In light of this, the following section explores the suitability of the prison library as a setting for cultural activity and/or for follow-on activity to support prisoners to meet information needs recognised and/or triggered as a result of cultural engagement (i.e. further supporting their journey of reflection, understanding, and development).

#### **IV. The prison library**

Coyle (1987) questions, “After two centuries, an old question begs for a new and better answer than has generally been available: What are prison libraries for, and how can they best accomplish their purpose?” (p.1). In the EU context, the most recent edition of the ‘European Prison Rules’ published by the Council of Europe (2006) states that, “Every institution shall have a library for the use of all prisoners, adequately stocked with a wide range of both recreational and educational resources, books and other media” (p.15). In the US context, Lehmann and Locke’s (2005) ‘Guidelines for library services to prisoners’ states that the role of prison libraries should reflect the shift in focus of prisons worldwide from punishment to rehabilitation, explaining that, “The prison library then becomes an important part of the entire prison environment in its support for educational, recreational, and rehabilitative programs” (p.4). In the UK context, the most recent edition of ‘Guidelines for Prison Libraries’, published by the UK Library Association (1997), asserts that the purpose of the prison library is to “provide the resources necessary to meet the information, cultural and recreational needs of the prison community” and to “support all forms of education and training, formal classes, practical training, working parties, open and distance learning, and informal self-education” (p.11). Therefore, the prison library has a responsibility to meet the informational, cultural, recreational, and educational needs of the prison population. Vogel (2009) argues that in supporting these needs, the prison library plays a fundamental role in supporting the rehabilitation process, and should be recognised as a “valuable and indispensable resource in an offender’s preparation for re-entry” (p.182).

This section explores the various roles attributed to the prison library to better understand how they contribute to the rehabilitation process, and examines the suitability of the prison library for cultural activity and/or follow-on activity (i.e. supporting prisoners to meet information needs recognised and/or triggered as a result of their cultural engagement).

##### *(a) The information role of the prison library*

Lehmann (2011) explains that, “Incarcerated persons have a large number of unmet needs, which translate into a high demand for information, learning materials, and self-improvement resources”,

and argues that the prison library “can play a vital role in meeting these needs” (p.494). In light of this, the information role of the prison library can be understood as its responsibility to meet the information needs of the prisoner community it serves. Bowe (2011) stresses, “The library should be a neutral space where prisoners can feel safe and where their informational needs are dealt with in an effective and professional manner” (p.442). Beyond adhering to general guidance which states that prison libraries should stock a range of recreational, education, and legal materials (Council of Europe, 2006), prison libraries must therefore identify the needs of the specific prison population they serve to ensure that such needs are met. As Burt (1977) explains, “selection of materials cannot be separated from information needs, because the materials which meet those needs must obviously be made available” (p.34). However, it is recognised that this often presents a challenge for prison libraries who have a responsibility to meet the needs of often diverse and dynamic prison populations. For example, the UK Library Association (1997) state, “The population in any prison is inevitably diverse, and particularly in local prisons, may fluctuate rapidly” and explain that this has “implications for the library, the selection and provision of stock, the organization and presentation of the library, and the level of instruction and assistance provided” (p.20-21). In recognition of this, Reese, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), argues that, if a prison library is to ensure that it effectively serves its prisoner community, “collection development must be systematic and continuous” (p.69), and Clark and MacCraigh (2006) recommend prison libraries utilise patron requests, surveys, focus groups, and interviews to assess the needs of the prison population, emphasising that this is important because “user needs and tastes differ from community to community” (p.124).

Stevens and Usherwood (1995), discussing the rehabilitative aspects of the prison library’s information role, argue that prison libraries have a responsibility to provide prisoners with access to information that will help them to “cope with prison life” and to “begin to address their own offending behaviour and prepare for their eventual return to society” (p.33). Similarly, Zybert (2011) argues that, “The most useful books are those that not only help the inmates survive their time in prison, but also help them deal with anger and other negative feelings that may have contributed to their commitment of crimes” (p.413). However, it is recognised that prison libraries are reported as often failing to meet prisoners’ information needs (Bajić, 2015; Eze, 2014; Omagbemi and Odunewu, 2008; Tarzaan *et al.* 2015; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo *et al.* 2017). This is attributed to issues such as “Grossly inadequate and outdated collections [...] tight schedule in the prisons, censorship and emphasis on security” (Eze 2014, p.248). Therefore, there is a need for prison libraries to better ensure that stock development and service design is informed by the actual needs of the prison community, so that prisoners have access to the information required to meet their needs.

### *(b) The educational role of the prison library*

The prison library is also viewed as playing a key role in supporting formal prison education programmes. For example, the European Prison Rules state that the prison library has a “key place in the provision of education in prison” (Council of Europe, 2006, p.57), and supporting this, Bowe (2011) argues that the prison library “plays an important role to underpin work of the education department” (p.442). To accomplish this, the UK Library Association (1997) recommends that prison libraries stock materials which help prisoners to develop basic literacy, numeracy, communication and life skills (p.12). The value of the prison library in supporting prisoners’ education is often attributed to the unique atmosphere it offers within the wider prison establishment. For example, Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), points out that prisoners who have literacy issues may be reluctant to engage with formal educational programmes because they view institutions such as schools and prisons as “representative of what’s gone wrong in their lives” (p.127). She explains that the “neutral territory of the library” is conducive to engagement with such prisoners because it is “an unbiased place for learning where inmates get to select learning materials of their own choice” (p.127). This sentiment is echoed by Nason (1981) who states that the prison library offers prisoners “an informal, alternative approach to education” (p.8). Expanding upon this role, Stevens and Usherwood (1995) state that the

prison library plays a crucial role in supporting prisoners' education by giving prisoners with literacy issues the opportunity to seek "informal assistance with their problems from library staff rather than to risk embarrassment by making a more formal approach to other sources" (p.58). Further highlighting the value of prisoners' engagement with informal and independent learning in the library, Brosens *et al.* (2014) explain that participation in library activities can act as a bridge to other formal learning programmes, potentially encouraging prisoners to engage with such programmes who would not normally do so via less direct pathways.

A further important information access consideration relates to literacy issues. The UK charity Shannon Trust (2012) draw attention to the fact that almost half of the total UK prison population are functionally illiterate (i.e. lack the reading and writing skills normally required for successful employment). Clark and MacCreaigh (2006) state that prison libraries can support the development of prisoners' literacy skills by providing "a good solid literacy collection for learners, both as a supplement to literacy classes and to support independent learners" (p.133). Bowe (2011) argues that in addition to improving prisoners' reading and writing skills, the library can also support the development of information literacy skills as prison library services can help prisoners to better understand when and why they need information, where to find it, and how to assess, use and articulate it (p.432). Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001) explains that information literacy skills are essential to enable prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society following release from prison, because they need to not only be able to read to access information, but also be able to think critically and make good decisions about the types of information they seek and/or encounter in order to make informed decisions. Therefore, the prison library has an important role for supporting prisoners' academic and rehabilitative learning.

### *(c) The recreational role of the prison library*

The recreational role of the prison library is highlighted by the European Prison Rules which state that, "The library should be seen as a facility for all prisoners and as an important recreational resource" (Council of Europe, 2006, p.57), and in UK guidance for prison libraries which recommend prison libraries stock a wide range of "reading for leisure" materials in addition to more formal information sources (Library Association, 1997, p.23). The recreational role of the prison library is therefore related to the library's inherent role in providing materials and reader development activities which support reading for pleasure (Fowler, 2001). Coyle (1987) states that by offering prisoners the opportunity to engage in recreational pursuits, the prison library can help make prisons "more humane" while also making prison populations "more manageable" (p.2). In regards to the 'humane' aspects of this role, insight can be obtained by looking at prison library studies which suggest that recreational reading has therapeutic benefits in the prison context. For example, Ljødal and Ra (2011) explain, "For many prisoners, the library functions as a window to the world in an otherwise monotonous existence behind the walls. The library and the librarian bring mental stimulation from the outside into the prisons" (p.73). Stevens and Usherwood (1995) also acknowledge the benefits of the mental stimulation offered by recreational reading, explaining that reading can have a "calming effect" on prisoners which can subsequently lead to more positive behaviour (p.59). Cleeves, in Fowler (2001), explains that recreational reading supports prisoners' psychological wellbeing by offering them the opportunity "escape" real world problems (p.37), and Clark and MacCreaigh (2006) summarise the value of the recreational role the prison library plays, explaining (p.132):

*Inmates desperately need psychological escape and emotional enrichment, needs found at all levels of incarceration. And no one is better equipped to provide constructive ways of doing that than a library!*

Bowe (2011) states that reading for pleasure can also help prisoners to develop 'emotional literacy'; described as "the ability to manage one's own emotions and to understand what other people are

thinking and feeling”; which can in turn also raise prisoners’ self-esteem (p.432). Expanding upon this, Bowe adds that recreational reading is also associated with a number of outcomes which benefit the rehabilitation process; such as helping prisoners to reconnect with their families, learn key skills, address personal issues, and even change their attitudes towards learning (p.438). However, Nason (1981) cautions that recreational reading and associated activities supported by the prison library should not be viewed as having the sole purpose of meeting overarching rehabilitative goals, arguing that such activities are justifiable regardless of institutional aims given the general benefits to prisoners’ wellbeing (p.6-7).

*(d) The cultural role the prison library*

Zybert (2011) notes that prisoners are often culturally deprived due to coming from impoverished backgrounds prior to their imprisonment, and argues that the prison library can play an important role in introducing prisoners to new cultural experiences to help them pass time during imprisonment and to enrich their lives following release (p.419). Reflecting this, the UK Library Association (1997) states that prison libraries should stock materials which meet the cultural needs of the prison community. In relation, Peschers (2011) explains that prison libraries offer prisoners “cultural enrichment” by providing access to cultural resources (p.534). However, beyond providing information and resources which help to meet prisoners’ cultural needs, the prison library also plays a wider cultural role by acting as a setting for prisoners’ engagement with cultural activity. For example, Cramard (2011) argues that the prison library is often “the only area specifically designated as a “cultural space” inside the prison” (p.551), and notes that cultural activities focused on books, literature, and writing are normally held in the prison library, and often so popular that they are oversubscribed with long waiting lists (p.555-556). Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), explains that by hosting cultural activities such as reading groups, the prison library can support a number of outcomes which are beneficial to both prisoners’ wellbeing and their rehabilitation (p.130):

*Involvement in library book discussion groups can increase self-esteem inmates. [...] Inmates with literacy problems who join a group discussion refine social interaction skills as well as gain literacy skills. [...] Prison routines can easily bury an inmate’s feelings and emotions. Prison library programs such as the new-read book discussions can reverse this damage and foster an inmate’s personal growth.*

In addition to reading and creative writing groups which are most commonly associated with the prison library, Pitts, in Rubin and Suvak (2001), explains that prison libraries can support a range of other cultural activities, including offering movie screenings, running arts and crafts workshops, and inviting in guest speakers such as local authors (p.110-114). Cramard (2011) highlights that one benefit of hosting such activities in the prison library is that prisoners who might not normally otherwise visit the library become exposed to the materials and services offered there as a result of their cultural engagement (p.555-556). Bowe (2011) argues that hosting cultural activities in prison libraries can help to “add value to the library service and engage an often-disaffected prison population” (p.438). Therefore, acting as the setting for cultural activities may be another way for the prison library to increase awareness of its services amongst the prisoner community.

In earlier discussion, it was noted that prisoners’ can suspect “ulterior motives” when new programmes in the prison are initiated, and that this extends to non-formal interventions (Burt, 1977, p.32), and that participants must view the location in which cultural activities occur as a “safe environment” in order to fully benefit from their participation (Bilby *et al.* 2013, p.55). This is where the prison library has a key role to play in supporting prisoners’ engagement with cultural activity, given that it is frequently reported as an environment that is more conducive to prisoner engagement than other areas of prisons. For example, Nason (1981) explains that the library setting can offer prisoners much needed relief from the “tense environment” often found elsewhere in the prison

establishment (p.3). Similarly, Lehmann and Locke (2006) explain, "The prison library also provides a level of "normalcy" in a highly regulated environment as a place where individuals are free to make their own choices and engage in self-directed pursuits" (p.4). Bowe (2011) notes that the prison library has the ability to engage normally 'disaffected' prisoners because it is "one of the few places they [prisoners] can feel human again and where they are not just a number. In the library they are free to make their own choices and do not have to follow orders." (p.422). Consequently, it arguably provides perhaps the most suitable setting within the prison for cultural activity and self-expression, and importantly, for providing prisoners with follow-on support with any needs arising from cultural engagement.

However, despite the benefits of locating cultural activities in the prison library, it is recognised that not all prison libraries will have the required staffing or facilities to do so. For example, discussing the potential difficulties of delivering reading groups in the prison library, Fowler (2001) explains that, "Limited staff time, lack of space for sessions, lack of suitable reading material in sufficient quantity, the rapid turnover of potential members, all conspire to push reading groups into the category of 'a good idea but not really feasible here'" (p.59). However, even in instances where prison libraries cannot directly facilitate cultural activities, they still have an important role in supporting prisoners with any follow-up information and support needed. To achieve this, the prison librarian, in a collaborative outreach role, should be involved in the cultural activity to make prisoners aware that follow-up information and support can be found in the prison library. Further, via advance collaboration with the creative agencies delivering the cultural activity, the prison library can ensure stock is available which reflects the themes covered or likely to arise, and made easily accessible in the library via book displays and other promotional material etc. However, currently there is no substantial evidence of such collaboration. For example, despite recommendations that prison libraries stock information and resources which may serve as a follow-up from formal rehabilitative programmes (Lehmann and Locke, 2006, p.6; Stearns, 2004, p.72), no evidence is provided as to whether or not this occurs. Therefore, further research is required in this area.

### *Discussion and summary*

A review of literature suggests that the prison library plays four key roles within the wider prison establishment. The *information role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to meet the information needs of the prisoner community it serves (Burt 1977), and in so doing, can support prisoners' rehabilitation by providing information to help prisoners cope with prison life and address their offending behaviour (Stevens and Usherwood, 1995; Zybert, 2011). The *educational role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to provide educational resources which support the work of formal education programmes (Bowe, 2011) and prisoners' independent learning (Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak, 2011; Nason, 1981). The prison library is also recognised as supporting the development of important literacy skills fundamental to successful reintegration into society following release from prison (Clark and MacCreaigh, 2006; Bowe, 2011; Piascik, in Rubin and Suvak, 2001). The *recreational role* refers to the responsibility for prison libraries to provide materials to support reading for pleasure (Fowler, 2001), which is recognised as beneficial to prisoners' wellbeing (Clark and MacCreaigh, 2006; Cleeves, in Fowler, 2001; Ljødal and Ra 2011) and their rehabilitation (Bowe, 2011). The *cultural role* refers to the responsibility of prison libraries to support prisoners' cultural engagement by providing access to culturally-enriching materials (Library Association, 1997; Peschers, 2011), and offering prisoners' the opportunity to participate in cultural activities such as reading and creative writing groups (Cramard, 2011; Pitts, in Rubin and Suvak, 2001). The relaxed and informal atmosphere of the prison library is viewed as useful in engaging normally disengaged prisoners (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981), and it is therefore considered a suitable setting in which to explore the potential for cultural activity to support prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs. It is important to point out that the discrete manner in which these roles are discussed serves

only to provide clarity for the reader, and that the relationships between these roles are complex and interwoven.

Overall, there is evidence that the various roles (i.e. information, education, recreation, and cultural) played by the prison library contribute to a wide range of benefits for prisoners, many of which are recognised as having important rehabilitative purpose. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of authors have recently attempted to draw greater attention to the wider rehabilitative role of the prison library (e.g. Ings and Joslin, 2011; Šimunić *et al.* 2014; Zybert, 2011). Offering a useful summary of how the various roles attributed to the prison library help support the rehabilitation of prisoners, Ings and Joslin (2011, p.407) explain:

*Prison libraries continue to contribute to public safety by supporting the Correctional Services mandate to provide safe and secure control of offenders, while preparing them for reintegration into the community. Specifically, the prison libraries support this mandate by providing information and materials that help the offenders equip themselves for useful occupations, increase their competence to form sound judgements, increase their understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage, and enhance their personal and social well-being. In doing so, the prison library is a vital resource for offenders, as they prepare to re-enter society as law-abiding citizens.*

In summary, for the purposes of this chapter in exploring potential avenues through which prisoners can be supported to recognise and address sensitive information needs, attention is drawn to the prison library responsibility to meet prisoners' information needs, whilst providing an environment where individuals can explore creativity and culture (Stevens and Usherwood, 1995). Consequently, the prison library is considered the ideal setting in which to explore the role of cultural activities in supporting prisoners to recognise and address sensitive information needs. The prison library is viewed as the only specifically designated "cultural space" within the prison and is regarded as the typical setting for cultural activities such as reading and creative writing groups (Cramard, 2011, p.551-555), and the atmosphere of the prison library is considered more conducive to engagement than other prison settings (Bowe, 2011; Lehmann and Locke, 2006; Nason, 1981). The prison library is also recognised as having the potential to support prisoners in addressing sensitive information needs through its core role as an information-provider (e.g. Burt, 1977; Campbell, 2005; Canning and Buchanan, 2018; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2014). However, given that prison library design, staffing and provision can vary greatly between establishments, a number of important questions remain regarding the suitability of prison libraries for supporting cultural activities and follow-on prisoner support with arising information needs, particularly those of a sensitive nature. These include: are processes in place for collaboration between prison libraries and creative agencies?; will all prison libraries have the space and/or resources required to support various cultural activities?; will all prisons have staff available for outreach and/or to escort prisoners to and from activities?; and who will be involved in these activities (e.g. librarians, teachers, prison officers, and/or creative agencies), and in what ways? Such questions warrant further exploration and highlight the need for further work on collaborative models of support.

## **V. Conclusion and recommendations for further research**

In conclusion, this chapter presents a new perspective on the enduring problem of how prisons can support prisoners' rehabilitation, focused on the meeting of prisoners' information needs. There is evidence that prisoners' sensitive information needs (e.g. relating to remorse, mental health, relationships) are often unmet and that this appears to stem from recognition and repression issues, and a range of access and behavioural barriers which hinder prisoners' information seeking. These

unmet sensitive needs present a significant issue as they are recognised as having the potential to negatively impact on prisoners' coping and rehabilitation, and as such, it is essential that prisoners are supported in recognising and addressing these needs. Cultural activities, often delivered by external organisations, are identified as a suitable intervention method given evidence suggesting that such activities can encourage self-reflection and recognition of needs, and importantly do so in non-confrontational, indirect way. In relation, the prison library, as the cultural heart of the prison, has a key partnership role to play being well positioned to act as a source of ongoing support following prisoners' engagement with cultural activities (i.e. helping prisoners to address information needs recognised or better understood through cultural activity); however, there is currently limited evidence of explicit collaboration and follow-on activity in practice.

Given the identified lack of research (and evidence of collaboration) in this area, further work is recommended to establish working models of collaboration between creative agencies and prison libraries to support prisoners with sensitive information needs unrecognised or repressed. For example, a series of creative writing workshops exploring the theme of fatherhood could be offered to male prisoners who have or are expecting children, as a means of encouraging recognition and discussion of common challenges, such as role and relationships. However, it is crucial that prisoners are not only supported to recognise information needs, but are also able to address them, and this is where the prison library can play an important collaborative role by offering participants access to tailored information, if required, following their cultural engagement. To achieve this, prison libraries should, in advance of activities, actively collaborate with the creative agencies responsible for designing and delivering cultural activities to ensure that prisoners have access to the information and support required to address needs typically arising from the themes/topics explored during the cultural activity. To ensure that such information is accessible, prison libraries could provide themed book displays and resource stands etc. to assist prisoners with independent access to suitable learning resources, and librarians could be prepared in advance should prisoners request assistance in seeking information on themes/topics. Further suggested topics for priority attention relate to issues of remorse, relationships (i.e. partner and/or relative), and mental health.

In summary, this chapter presents evidence which suggests that there is significant potential for engagement with cultural activity to assist prisoners with addressing sensitive information needs unrecognised or repressed. However, whilst appearing a promising method for initial attention to information needs, there is limited evidence of follow-on support post cultural activity either through cultural agency follow-up or library support. Therefore, this chapter sets an important agenda for further collaboration between creative agencies and prison libraries to provide continuity of support to prisoners, and to further develop the library as a key change agent in the progressive rehabilitation of prisoners.

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