



Inside innovators

Supporting prison staff to find imaginative ways of tackling prison drug problems can have encouraging results, as **DDN** reports.

Why shouldn't innovation be part of prison life?, asks Peter Mason, chief executive of the Centre for Public Innovation. 'Innovation can work better than anything else I know. It can liberate energy and productivity.'

Furthermore, he believes that 'innovation works better under scarce resources. Necessity is the mother of invention.'

As chief executive of the Centre for Public Innovation, Mason has been an enthusiastic driver for improvements in prison health over the past five years. 'We've been delighted to support over 500 innovations in the prison system,' he told winners at the recent Prison Health Innovation Awards. This year the award focused on bright ideas to tackle substance misuse issues for prisoners and offenders.

The initiative had brought 'thous-

ands of prisoners into contact with innovations' and encouraged improved relationships within prisons. Mason encouraged prison staff at the ceremony to be brave in capitalising on opportunity and tenacious in putting ideas in place.

'Innovation can be breathtakingly simple,' he said. 'But pound for pound it can work better than anything else I know.'

Presenting the awards, Richard Bradshaw, director of prison health for England and Wales said: 'The challenge for us is to take some of these ideas and make them applicable elsewhere. We can make the learning curve for others a lot shorter.'

Gemma Sayers and Debbie Sayers work at Lewes Prison, a category B male prison in East Sussex. Noticing the vulnerability of remand prisoners to drug deaths as soon as they were

released spurred them on to develop Overdose Aid – a scheme to give inmates practical skills and knowledge.

Important information on how to recognise signs of overdose, when to call an ambulance, and resuscitation were taught through quizzes, demonstrations and a video, with support from their primary care trust.

'The information held quite a few surprises for prisoners,' said the mother and daughter team. 'We broadened it to include anaphylactic shock and other situations, so they could use their skills in everyday life.'

Katie Roberts and Louise Atherton wanted to tackle the issue of steroid abuse among many of the young men at Thorn Cross Young Offenders Institution. Initial thoughts of getting in a guest speaker transformed into a dynamic publicity campaign targeting the whole prison, from training as part of the induction programme to examining the dangers of steroids through performing a play.

'All of the trainees said it had made them think about lifestyle choices,' said Roberts. 'We set about building confidence and self-esteem. The difference in some of the prisoners was remarkable.' They now plan to take the information to local schools and colleges.

Michael Cowan wanted to help turn the attitudes of young men at Feltham Young Offenders Institution from negative to positive. With the help of psychiatrist Johan Reshiglues, he developed a boardgame called Spiral Choices, where players make lifestyle decisions about drug and alcohol misuse, with the help of a facilitator.

'Participants were amazed they could have choices,' said Cowan.

Moving forward with every throw of the dice to reach 'life' at the end, they learned a lot about teamwork, he explained. 'Scenario' cards along the way generated discussion on what they should do in different situations, and they received a certificate at the end.

'The certificate was good for them,' said Cowan. 'Some young people in prison felt they hadn't achieved anything in their life.'

Mike Underwood set himself the challenge of improving prisoners' knowledge of drug misuse and sexual health for their return from Everthorpe Prison to the outside world. With freebies from Durex, who were keen to support the initiative, he engaged

prisoners in designing a harm reduction pack. Alongside condoms, the pack had information on where to go to access services in the community, and a survey asked them if they had found the pack useful and used the contents – which was free to post back, with the chance of winning an iPod.

Admitting that producing the pack was not easy – 'prisoners' attention span is so short' – Underwood said the project was worth the effort: 'If they use it once, it'll have done its job.'

A CARAT worker at Ashwell Prison, Scott Davidson wanted to encourage more prisoners to relocate to the voluntary drug testing unit. His task was not easy: plenty of drugs were finding their way into the open prison, so he thought about ways to challenge the boredom that led to drug use.

Believing that a programme of leisure activities would incentivise them to try a more positive approach, Davidson introduced bingo games and quiz nights, where participants played in teams. Those with negative drug tests had their names entered into a draw to use a Playstation for a weekend.

With the experiment achieving positive results, he now runs activity nights every Wednesday and Thursday, and has brought in an Xbox Console for football tournaments.

Charlotte Tompkins and Nat Wright, of Leeds Prison, chose producing a health promotion DVD to bring home the dangers of drug taking in prison. The film showed ex-injecting drug users talking about aspects of using drugs inside, and looked at using motivational enhancement therapy to change behaviour.

Working for North Lancashire PCT, Hilary Abernethy knew all about the high levels of blood borne viruses in the region. Conducting Kirkham Prison's health needs assessment made her realise the need for more sexual health education for prisoners, and she set up a training course that would go beyond teaching prisoners, to helping them become peer educators to other inmates. She trained up to ten prisoners at a time about blood borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections.

Working between the PCT and the prison had presented some difficult challenges – but, says Abernethy, 'giving prisoners responsibility for their own health renewed my somewhat flagging motivation'. **DDN**