



The logo, colours and design of the scheme were all done by the men in HMP Wealstun

### The 6-Step Problem Support Mentor Scheme



HMP Wealstun have in place a 'Problem Support' peer mentors scheme part of which is to help reduce violence across the establishment. This scheme is a joint initiative between the establishment and the Universities of York and in collaboration with Leeds

Problem solving skills are a simple technique that doesn't require specialist mental health training and can be taught to many people. People who experience incidents of violence often cite problems in their lives as being a reason for their behaviour. The process helps to model a pro-social environment, which supports the improvements of the culture and rehabilitation agenda, improve staff-prisoner relationships and requires minimal resource input.

The scheme works by:

- The mentors are encouraged to identify potential peers themselves who might need support in using the skills to resolve/manage a problem
- Staff are asked to identify individuals who need support to the problem support mentor
- On induction a mentor introduces the scheme to all new prisoners to highlight the service
- The mentors recognise that they are also part of a research study that enables them to collect data about who they see and what kinds of problems they are asked to support in.
- The scheme focuses on empowerment, encourages individuals to take control of their own circumstances and supports the relationship between staff and prisoners. It promotes dealing with problems in a proactive manner taking time to make decisions about the best course of action.
- There is a recognition that not all problems can be 'solved' and sometimes prisoners use the skills to devise coping mechanism of how to deal better with their circumstances.

The scheme involves 6 one-hour training sessions for the prospective problem-solving mentors using standardised training material and is delivered by the University of York who provide supervision sessions and a working reference. Over 80 men have been trained to deliver the 6-step problem-solving approach, passing their skills onto over 1,000 peers. The manual and training materials have been adopted and are supported with the 6-Step Thinking Skills model to provide consistency of teaching across the estate and have been endorsed with the 6-Step licence and the HMPPS logo. Everything is done with service users at the heart of this project.

**Co-written newspaper article:**

<https://insidetime.org/problem-solved>

**Information shared on the HMPPS intranet:**

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/news-and-updates/features/universities-train-prison-problem-solving-champions>

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/news-and-updates/features/hmp-wealstun-problem-support-mentor-showcase-success>

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/news-and-updates/features/family-day-fun-at-hmp-wealstun>

**Co-produced Animation with the story and experiences of service users from within the group:**

<https://youtu.be/zyzkQIjIDw> animation (5 mins).

**Service user webinar with the voices of the men who take part in the scheme:**

<https://youtu.be/rbj62UIW0KA> webinar (30 mins)

**Service user podcast – this was accompanied by a prison radio association ‘take over show’**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/itcusxodvcqt8h9/Wealston-mentors.mp3?dl=0>

**Project website**

<https://www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences/research/mental-health/projects/peer-led-problem-solving/>

**Published academic articles what we do must be underpinned by evidence:**

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/10/e026095> (first feasibility study to test our ideas)

<https://healthandjusticejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40352-019-0094-9> - (qualitative results)

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(20\)30446-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(20)30446-6/fulltext) (latest evidence supporting a reduction in self-harm behaviour)

#### **Testimonies from service users and staff:**

Quote from resident:

*'I see a lot of people with problems struggling around me and when I heard of the scheme (problem solving) I thought it would be good to take part and help the ones who need it that I see every day. As I've been there an know how it feels to let your problems build up'*

*'I learnt that following the seven steps helps in every-day life'*

*'I have learnt that there is nothing wrong with asking others for help if you need it. It's better to face your problems rather than ignore them. We made plans in my own life and I've set myself goals to see them through and stay assertive with a positive attitude to life'*

*'Skills that help to direct others into learning things to help themselves in future situations'*

*'I feel that I can help others, plus by doing the course helps me find my self-awareness so I feel better in myself'*

*'The benefits are I get to help others and assist them in tackling there problems day to day. It has also helped me to use the skills myself and not let my problems get the best of me'*

*'On many occasions as my role in the prison involves meeting prisoners that needed help already. I've learnt to pass the skills on even to others that initially aren't up for learning new skills or even aware that they require them'*

*'Actually identifying the specific problem as due to the nature of prison life all the persons problems roll into one and seem huge and unmanageable when if they break them down they may realise that it is broken down rather than burying their head in the sand'*

*'As I'm prone to letting things build up when now I realise that if any small issues come up its best to deal with them using the problem solving champion skills and the ability to see where I've gone wrong in the past will help me to not get like that again'*

Quote from staff:

*As an Induction Officer, I can see that the Problem Support mentors role has had a massively positive effect on the way new arrivals into Wealstun are put at ease and helped through their first few days in the establishment. Problem Supporters are readily available on the wing and easy to spot in their labelled t-shirts in order for new arrivals to approach them and ask questions or be signposted to things in order to make their stay as easy as possible.*

*Induction Officers are often very busy, but the implementation of the Problem Supporters has allowed us more time to do the important work that so often gets left to the last minute while we're racing around answering questions and settling new prisoners. Staff are, and always will be, a port of call for all prisoners but Problem Supporters are approaching new arrivals and helping them with an all manner of things, including where to find applications, how to apply for work and even where to get a toothbrush or toilet roll from - things that are very important to prisoners and were previously taking up a lot of staff time. The fact that new arrivals no longer have the stress of thinking they're not being heard can only have a positive effect on stress levels, and ultimately lower the number of ACCT documents being opened. I hope to see how this correlation pans out in the future.*

*For the Problem Supporters themselves, the scheme has given them a chance to not only help other prisoners seek methods to resolve their own issues but to use their skills inwardly. This will go a long way to helping them manage life in prison and also on the outside, which I'm sure will have a positive impact on rehabilitation.*