

Vox Liminis: Voices from the Threshold

The Difference We Make

January 2020



Collated by Colleen Souness on behalf of the Vox Team



Who we are

Vox Liminis is an arts and community organisation working with people involved with the criminal justice system – prisoners, former prisoners, and people on community sentences; families; practitioners; and the wider public - to spark fresh conversations and insights that enable positive change in how we together deal with crime, punishment and reintegration.

We run song-writing projects in prison and community justice settings with staff and those serving sentences, make art with a collective of young people who have had a family member in prison, lead family music workshops in prison visits to support family relationships, and build on-going community with the diverse group of people involved in all of the above.

We then share creative work that we've made together in public and professional settings, provoking dialogue and giving pointers to ways that we might imagine things anew.

Underpinning our approach is a belief that the rehabilitation of people back into society after they have committed offences requires both systemic and social change.

A relatively young organisation (6 years old), our work to date has positioned us within Scotland as a leader in designing and delivering creative approaches to better understanding complex social issues, and imagining new futures through these processes and artistic outputs.

Vox Liminis is working towards cultural change through cultural means in criminal justice, which is a site of our society's most intractable and complex social problems.

Most of this work is streamed within four main projects:

- **Distant Voices** is an established project stimulating deeper deliberation on issues of punishment and reintegration through art-based (principally songs) collaborative dialogue. It is now a substantial 3-year research project, working with Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and the West of Scotland.
- **KIN** is an arts collective with young people affected by parental or sibling imprisonment, who share their experiences and knowledge through artwork, to raise awareness and dialogue on the effects of familial imprisonment on young people.
- **In Tune** supports family relationships while a parent is in prison through family music making and song-writing.
- **Unbound** is a community of people involved in Vox outside of, but underpinning, the more structured projects above, meeting together weekly for food and music, and developing and sustaining relationships around a vision to effect change in criminal justice

Content

This report offers useful insights about the delivery of, participation in and outcomes of our work. In particular, we have drawn together evidence from people involved across our four main projects to demonstrate the positive difference we make.¹

This report contains the following:

[We make music, art and build community](#)

[We evaluate and learn from our work](#)

[We engage with professionals and members of the public](#)

[We make a difference](#) - nine outcomes

[What next?](#)

We believe that our work, along with the collective efforts of others in Scotland, helps contribute towards a fair and just Scotland where people can live fulfilling lives as contributing citizens after punishment.

We invite you to learn more by visiting our website or get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.

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¹ Information is drawn from the 2018/19 financial year unless stated otherwise.

We make music, art and build community

In 2018/19², we worked with 190 individuals on 885 separate occasions across the year in our four main projects.³ This includes people who participated in workshops in prisons or community.

We bring diverse individuals together to make music or art in workshops. These may be one-off sessions held over 1-3 days, or may be part of activities in sustained communities where people participate regularly throughout the year (e.g. in **KIN** and **Unbound**). Workshops equip people with creative ways to express themselves, and open up conversations such as how people's lives are affected by the criminal justice system in Scotland, the ways in which people can make more positive futures for themselves and for their families, or the roles we all play in building a fairer society.

Compared to last year, we continue to work with a similar volume of individuals but engage more frequently (up from 517). This is positive, due mostly to the development and increased depth of engagement in our Unbound (weekly) community.

Our engagement figures do not capture the ad hoc informal interactions we have throughout the year, for example with members of the Unbound community, which are an important aspect of our community and support for re-entry.



² Oct 2018 to Sep 2019. Information is drawn from 2018/19 financial year unless stated otherwise.

³ We count the number of individuals who take part in one of our projects at least once (avoiding duplication). Some individuals take part more than once or regularly in Unbound or KIN communities, so we also capture number of total engagements.

We engage with professionals and members of the public

We work with the public and professionals (in roles related to justice) through live performances of original songs or artwork, in discussions, talks, lectures or creative workshops to learn about or respond to issues of reintegration, crime and punishment. This happens largely within the Distant Voices project, KIN and through other commissioned activities (Vox Insights).

In 2018/19 we engaged over 2,600 people across 37 events. This included public and professional events – some hosted by ourselves, such as practitioner workshops, concerts and exhibitions, or at external conferences and events. Media coverage typically occurs in printed press, online and national radio.

Table 1: Public engagement event and number of people reached* (Oct 2018 – Sept 2019)

Event type	No. of Events	No. of people engaged
Conferences	11	1,200
Workshops (with public/practitioners)	8	444
Lecture / Presentation	5	338
Vox Concert	2	299
Performances at external events	2	325
Seminar	1	20
Exhibitions	1	50
Radio Spot play of original songs	4	Unknown*
Featured on TV	3	Unknown*
Total	37 events	2,676* people

* audience figures from public media coverage is unknown and will add to the total



Jo Mango, Emma Pollock, Louis Abbott & Donna Maciocia sharing songs and stories from the Distant Voices project at London's Union Chapel in March 2019. Photo by Phil Barnes.

We evaluate and learn from our work

We are committed to understanding the ways our work is successful, and where we could further develop our practice. We capture and report evidence of our work in three ways: the number of activities/events we deliver (outputs); the number of people we reach or work with (participation), and the difference this makes or contributes towards (outcomes).

At present, we primarily understand the difference made in our projects by creating space for people to respond to their experience. We do this in many ways, depending on the type and the context of the work. Methods include semi-structured conversations, focus groups, questionnaires, observations, and reflective activities with participants or the team. To understand the effect of our public engagement work, where possible we ask audiences for their reactions in the form of 'postcards' or 'vox pops'. We review these insights for evidence of change against our nine intended outcomes, to understand frequency and nature of the outcomes we achieve across our projects.

Improving our evaluation practice

Strong reflective practice is built into all our work in Vox Liminis. However, we recognise areas in which we can better evidence the impact of our work. This year we will review and strengthen our evaluation practices. This will include clarifying our organisational outcomes (set in 2013) and our methods for gathering and storing information, and ensuring clear processes to routinely draw together, analyse and communicate the volume of evidence we gather across our diverse work. We believe this will help strengthen evidence we need to inform our practice, and better communicate the difference that arts and community play in shaping a more just society.

Distant Voices Project - opportunity for deeper knowledge and learning

Distant Voices is an collaborative action research project. It will produce rigorous and published research to deepen our understanding of reintegration. Through this research, we will be able to share more about the social impact of our work beyond the effect on individual participants. Distant Voices draws on the personal and professional experience of researchers with different backgrounds, including community development, criminology, popular music, politics and youth work, and people with first-hand knowledge of criminal justice. A paper published in 2019, 'Reintegration, hospitality and hostility' is an example of the learning that will continue to be produced from Distant Voices, which comes to an end in 2020.

www.voxliminis.co.uk/media/reintegration-hospitality-and-hostility-song-writing-and-song-sharing-in-criminal-justice/

We make a difference

Through our work, we aim to make or contribute towards change in nine outcome areas. These include short and long term outcomes that we believe contribute towards achieving our vision and mission:⁴

Vision:

A society which responds to crime by helping those involved to find ways to recover, repair and thrive together in the communities to which they belong.

Mission:

To work with others for radical, positive and lasting changes in how Scotland responds to crime, so as to bring our vision closer to reality.

Among those we worked with in 2018/19, participants were most likely to have experienced changes in their confidence, communication skills, and ability to work towards a common goal.

Table 2: Number of workshop participants* experiencing positive change (outcomes)⁵

Outcome	No. of workshop participants experiencing change
Improved communication skills	133
Increased confidence	118
Increased ability to work towards a common goal	110
Improved mental wellbeing	75
Increased and/or sustained family relationships	60
Increased ability to effect positive change	59
Increased capacity to navigate transitions	28
Increased numbers accessing education, employment and training opportunities	27
Increased community engagement in reintegration*	75
Total	685

* Does not include outcomes from the 2,600 people reached in our public engagement work

⁴ Note: These nine outcomes were set in 2013 and will be reviewed in the year ahead to ensure they fully capture changes that happen as a result of our work as its developed over the years.

⁵ A participant can show '1 outcome' in a short-term project (e.g. a Vox Session), or once per quarter in a long-term project (e.g. KIN). Within these time-scales, outcomes are only counted once, regardless of the number of times evidence may have been seen. This helps to avoid double counting and painting a false picture of our work.

Aside from making a difference with and for individuals, we also aim to effect change at institutional and societal level by increasing public engagement in issues of reintegration. The figures for ‘community engagement in reintegration’ outcome (above) reflect only the experience of individuals who take part in our projects, and doesn’t include the numbers of people who may experience change as a result of our public engagement work. We will undertake work this year to better understand the effect of our public engagement work and influence on institutional and system change, where possible.

The rigorous research that will be produced from Distant Voices project, with academic partners, will also deepen our understanding about the wider social impact of our work, beyond just the effect on individual participants.

We know that capturing ‘numbers’ is limited in what it can convey about the significance or nature of changes for people. Therefore, the following section provides some insight into each of the nine outcomes we achieve through our work, drawing examples from specific projects and brought to life through the words of participants we work with. We invite you to listen to their experience.

Communication Skills

One of the strongest areas of change for participants in our workshops is their increased ability to communicate or express ideas, opinion, story or experience through making music or art. This has various significance for individuals, including being able to share their experience so that it is ‘seen’ by others, to show more complicated or nuanced (positive) aspects of their lives, and/or to communicate in a way that contributes to a wider purpose or change. This is particularly evident from participants in ‘Vox Sessions’ - the **Distant Voices** song-writing workshops:

“Normally... I wouldn’t speak to anybody about that but it gave me a chance of letting the feeling come out on a piece of paper and not only that but your loved one can listen to it as well... It gave me an opportunity in a different way just to express myself... so it’s a big thing” (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Inverness, Nov 2018)

“... this has been very, very helpful, it actually has for me personally probably allowed me for the first time in a few years to actually be able to put down in words what the last thirty years of my life has been like. Again, for me there’s a lot more depth perhaps to what I’ve wrote than will be apparent to other people, but I can see my entire life in that, and perhaps other people will. And if it helps someone else come out from the shadows then that’s surely a good thing.” (Polmont Women, Distant Voices Vox Session, Nov 2018)

“Interesting to see guys that couldn’t or wouldn’t speak about some really important issues... open up and speak about some heartfelt things. Opened my eyes... to how music can help people open up and address things” (Prison Officer, HMP Inverness, Distant Voices Vox Session)

“It has opened my eyes completely to how open the other guys are in a different situation. Seeing how talented they are, for one, cos when they’re in the halls you maybe think, ‘oh, they’re not doing much today’” and you wonder what’s really beneath? And then when you see them in a scenario like this, it really brings them out their shell and I found it amazing. It gets a good relationship going with the guys as well; they then find that they can talk to you a wee bit better.” (Prison Officer, HMP Inverness, Distant Voices Vox Session)

I have learned to loosen up a bit, to be yourself, to honestly express yourself. I think if you do that then you know that will make you more healthier because you are not shying away from things. It matures you, you don’t have to go through years of experience of something, one day can mature you and make you think differently and I think it is great. (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Castle Huntly April 2019)

Young people in the **KIN** project work together over a longer time period, and demonstrate the benefits of making art with others who also experience a family member in prison, enabling them to communicate the issues they face without worry, pressure or stigma.

“I think what we’re doing just now is helping a lot. It’s getting it out in the open. I can feel free to talk about these things, I think that worrying about what is someone going to think, am I burden on anyone? Is anyone gonna understand? But people [here] will understand because wow they’ve been through it n all. I like how it’s not so focused on talking about it but at the same time it is focused cause that’s what it’s about. I like it. I think it’s good.” (KIN young person, 2019)

“It’s probably the best thing for me. It’s better than social work. It’s a lot better than social work and it helps me a lot better than having to talk to teachers about it ... this is a lot better than all of that.” (KIN young person, 2019)

During **In Tune**’s song-writing workshops with parents (mostly fathers) in prison, we observe powerful changes in their improved ability to communicate with their children. Participants express that it is often the first time they have been given the space to speak openly and honestly about their children and what they want to say to them. (See outcome ‘increased and/or sustained family relationships’).

In the weekly gathering of the **Unbound** community, improved communication skills are evident as individuals become more comfortable and supported to make and share dinner, company, music and art together, which often leads people to share their needs and/or offer support for others situations. This indicates the significance of being part of a regular, safe, and positive community.

‘A’ came and explained there’s some changes to his living situation and is temporarily staying in West End. ‘C’ asked him if there was anything that would be helpful for him - he said coming to Vox is really helpful. He had some emotional moments during the night and expressed feeling bad about showing emotion. Later in the night, both ‘M’ and ‘S’ spoke in

the group sharing about expression of emotion as a positive thing.' (Unbound session summary notes, April 2019)

Confidence

Another strong area of change described by the people we work with is increased confidence as a result of making creative work together, even where this is a short workshop of two or three days in the **Distant Voices** song-writing workshop for example. For many, writing songs together is a new experience that takes people out of their comfort zone in a safe, fun environment.

"I'm really pleased and I've learned quite a lot, and it's brought my inner out of me, so my inner self and I'm more confident now than before and it's something I've never done before." (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Barlinnie, Jan 2019)

It's actually good to get music to words, because I do like writing, it's been good, it's been good confidence-wise. I've got bad anxiety, so just to even come here was a bit of a stretch, but then as the days have gone on the more comfortable I've been. (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Inverness, Nov 2018)

"I had no idea of what to expect going into it. I'm glad I have done it though. Being in a group situation has built up my confidence slowly but surely." (Distant Voices, Inverness Community Vox Session, February 2019)

"I think it's a confidence thing for me, I've really doubted myself in the past and kind of self-sabotaged, hence I ended up in prison and that was a big awakening for me. And just by chance I heard that music class in the prison and I was like, do you know what I'll go along and I went along and since then I've just found so much confidence building just from playing the guitar ... I find it awkward but the more I sing the more confident I get because I'm building on it. It's like a learning curve, but I think it really did help me through my sins, and my partner has noticed the change, just more positive and more creative because I used to be really negative and just looked at the bad things. I just think it's a really good way to express yourself and a really good habit instead of really bad habits that I once had." (participant 'L' reflecting on his participation in a Distant Voices Vox Session months later, Dec 2018)

In the **Unbound** community, we often observe positive changes in people's confidence. Sometimes this is evident in a single evening (quote below) or gradually over a longer time period as together we make and share work with each other. This year we've observed increased confidence among regular members who have increasingly taken up ownership of the space and decisions during the evening.

"ST and RR used his experience of first entering the downstairs space as a basis for writing and ended up writing a poem together about it. ST was quite under-confident about his writing ability but RR worked closely with him to persuade him that it wasn't "like school".

By the end of the night ST seemed happy with what he had created and seemed to relax into the group.” (Unbound weekly session summary notes, October 2019)

Within **KIN**, working with the same young people across longer time periods provides an opportunity to see the growth in confidence of the young people, either through the regular coming together to make art together, or when sharing and speaking of the artwork with public audiences about the effects of familial imprisonment.

“J” spent the conference speaking to policy makers and people working within the criminal justice system. During questions he answered confidently to the conference and even spoke of his own experience. Later reflecting he said “It was something I’d never done before but maybe something I’ll do again in the future. It was really good...Really happy with what I’ve put into it that I’ve made.” (KIN observations, and KIN young person reflection, 2018/19)

“At first I was very nervous. I have done art before but I’ve never actually been good at. Although there isn’t a wrong, it doesn’t matter if you do make a mistake. But now Sunday at the end I feel really good, I feel like I’ve really enjoyed it. I found you don’t always have to be “good at art” to make something good. Really happy with myself.” (KIN young person reflection on weekend residential, 2018/19)

“This was ‘R’s first time travelling out of Scotland. The trip was packed with sightseeing and you could see her confidence continue to grow as she began to explore the city more.” (KIN observations, 2018/19)



Ability to work towards a common goal

A key aspect of our work is to facilitate participants to make art together in group settings, rather than individually. **Distant Voices** song-writing workshops or **Unbound** sessions often draw together people who have different roles or experiences - for example, prison officers, prisoners, social workers, family members and members of the public. This offers a possible catalyst for new conversations, new ideas and new understandings with people who would otherwise never interact together in this way. We see changes in participants' ability to work towards a common goal, by observing providing input or help with others' ideas, understanding others opinions or experiences, accepting recommendations, or making art together with 'unlikely collaborators', such as prisoners and prison officers.

"Obviously I moaned to you about the prisoner officers, but I've got a bit more respect for them. Like the prison officers have been working with us, I won't mention their names, but before if I bumped into them in the hall and I was feeling a bit down, I wouldn't pick them to talk to but it's given me a bit comfort with them to talk to them about what is going on. Normally most of them you just think they're here to do a job, they don't care, but they showed that they want to help you." (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Inverness, Nov 2018)

"I thought it was good. It was good to see a different side to officers that they're not always bravado and that and they have little vulnerable spots just the same as the rest of us that they would never show in the standard prison environment but in here you create your own environment in here which puts everyone the same, that is how it felt like." (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Inverness, Feb 2019)

"I think the most surprising thing was just how open everybody's been and how much you can take from other people's ideas because a lot of people's ideas are just like wee nuggets of gold that they stick with and it kind of changes your perception of things hearing their songs and you think 'oh I would have sung it that way but that's actually really cool.... I'm more openminded now.'" (participant 'A' reflecting on his participation in a session months later, December 2018)



Distant Voices song-writing workshop in prison

During **In Tune** song-writing workshops held in prison, sessions begin by leading the participants (mainly Dads) through a group song writing exercise. For some parents, this is the first time they have been in a collective space where their children are the focus. Many parents in prison have said that they don't often discuss their families with other prisoners, for various reasons. However, the nature of the small group, common purpose, equality established among participants, and the trust that is built, allows them to speak openly and honestly, allowing the parents to help each other write both individual songs for their respective children and in creating group songs.

"I think that the guys coming here and doing this together, it's a shared experience that we've had together. All doing something for our kids. It's brilliant" (In Tune prison workshop, 2018/19)

"That's the embarrassing part, singing in front of the boys, but once we got over that it was great and we all looked after each other." (In Tune prison workshop, 2018/19)

"You've got us all to open up and speak from the heart." (In Tune prison workshop, 2018/19)

In Tune family workshops bring together parents and their children in prison, and families learn new songs and instruments together in weekly workshops. Within a few sessions, families can play along with the musicians in a steady beat, having supported and taught each other along the way. For example, families take the lead on some songs, where each take a turn to create a new beat for people to follow. For a lot of participants, it is the first time they have done anything musical in this way. Families quickly start to encourage and teach other, giving the parents the chance to learn new skills together with their children that they can continue to use outside the In Tune sessions.

Mental wellbeing

Many participants in **Distant Voices** song writing workshops reflect on the benefits to their mental health as a result of being creative in a creative, positive group environment. A common response is that a session provides a mental break to contribute to something positive, away from the challenges, culture or boredom of the prison environment or everyday routine.

"Especially the way the environment is here, my mind is all scattered everywhere and it was nice to get away from the usual thoughts, those everyday thoughts and just concentrate on the event here. It was a great pleasure to work with everybody especially [musician lead], she was our rock, she was very helpful." (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Barlinnie January 2019)

"Being a drug addict and a criminal and all the rest, you don't get many opportunities to do anything positive with your life, ... that song came from me, it was not anyone else messing

with it so it is a big accomplishment for me and I feel good about it, I feel great about it.” (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Barlinnie, Jan 2019)

“It’s like being back at college and uni and speaking to likeminded people, and it’s almost like an escapism from what you’re doing on a day to day basis. ... And this has been a complete breath of fresh air and the fact that I can forget all about that for three days. So massive form of escapism and just thoroughly enjoyed it. (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Castle Huntly, Apr 2019)

“I’m just amazed to experience this in prison. It’s like almost getting out of prison, meeting people from the outside with a different attitude and a different relaxed kind of atmosphere. It’s been really enjoyable from that point of view. I’ve come to the point where I can accept prison, it’s okay, but it’s just been a really nice experience working with the young people that are doing this work.” (Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Barlinnie, Jan 2019)

In Tune song-writing workshops support parents to write a song for their children. Dads have expressed that being able to communicate with their children in an exciting way provides a form of emotional release and positive effect on their mental health.

“It’s been great for my mental health, I’ve been genuinely happy. I’ve been buzzing, woken up in the morning and done this for five hours each day. I went back at lunchtime and thought about being back in the afternoon and thought here we go!” (In Tune prison workshop, 2019)

“It’s a brilliant course, I feel lighter and everything, I feel happy.” (In Tune prison workshop, 2019)

Young people in **KIN** express the benefit to their wellbeing of getting to know and become part of a group of peers with a shared purpose and experience of having a family member in prison. Young people reference that the fun, non-judgemental environment, and the focus on making art and having a shared purpose to influence wider change in the world has a significant benefit to their mental health.

“It’s like no a service in a way... it feels like a proper group of friends that are there to help ye. Instead of it being like social workers or something, it’s not so professional which makes it feel better.” (‘D’, KIN young person). From later speaking to both ‘D’ and his mum it was clear that ‘D’ has been struggling with his mental health and spent most of his summer holidays isolating himself. On the KIN residential he was animated and engaging with all activities. This shift was also noticed by ‘D’’s mother on his arrival home. (KIN young person reflection and KIN observations, 2018/19)

In **KIN**, the team regularly meet with young people individually outside the group gatherings, to ensure they and their family are finding the support they need. This

support is another important aspect of KIN that contributes to young people's improved mental health.

"I'm not really used to talking about [the impact of my brother coming home from prison] with people so it's kind of a weird thing to talk about it. But it felt good after it. I don't really have anyone to talk about it with 'cause I don't really like to burden my mum or my wee sisters. And I've not got any pals that have had that experience so it was weird to talk about it but good after it. Good to get it out in the open." (KIN young person reflection, 2018/19)

In the **Unbound** community, we regularly observe and receive feedback related to mental wellbeing. Members regularly attribute this to being connected within a community where we know we'll be welcomed, belong and understood. This is particularly important for those adjusting to liberation.

"And a lot of people come out [of prison], like myself, and I was happy for the first couple of days, like oh... result, I'm out, great, I'll go and see everybody, and after a couple of days I was lost. It was like everybody has moved on with their life [...] so I found that very hard and I'm still adjusting. [...] When you come here it feels like you don't need to be embarrassed, and you don't need to be ashamed because everybody treats you with the same respect but I just expect to be treated the way I treat people with respect, so I think this place is really comforting and you can relax in it. It's like therapy as well." (reflecting on Unbound, participant in Distant Voices Vox Session, December 2018)

"...really enjoyed last night again. Feel extremely supported, at a time when I really need a community, a tribe. Thanks to all for working from your heart! We all need a bigger connection. The Vox experience is something I've never had, to be part of something and to feel respected, heard and understood." (Unbound member, text correspondence, 2019)

Ability to effect positive change

Unbound and **KIN** projects both support 'communities of interest', in which members can find solidarity with others' who have similar experiences and an interest in effecting positive change for and with people involved in the criminal justice system. Being part of a strong community increases individuals' opportunities and ability to effect positive change – in our own lives, or at a community, societal or system level.

"I think it's a great thing that they do here, and when I came out that they kept in touch through Facebook and they've always dropped me a message every now and again, ask how I'm getting on, asked me out for a coffee, and invited me along to a few sessions and where I've met new people through the whole process. I brought my girlfriend along as well, we jammed at some tunes together, it's really good, and I'm really grateful for what I'm doing" [...] "when you come in, you see faces like you've not seen for a year and it's just instantly like a connection straightaway, it's just like a good community spirit between everybody,

even people you've not met you can go through..." (L's reflections on Unbound, after taking part in a prison Vox Session, December 2018)

Distant Voices song-writing workshops provide an opportunity to make music that may be shared more widely with the public or professionals, inviting new ways of thinking about punishment and reintegration. Creating a song that has the potential to affect positive change is significant for many participants; some speak about how useful they anticipate their song or experience will be to open dialogue, for example between prison officer and prisoner, or with members of their own family around relational or situational challenges.



Gus Bear recording keys for 'Fuck it Button', from the 'Oblivion and Beyond' EP, 2019

"My hopes are that [the song] will reach somebody, like myself, somebody that's may be not in their right frame of mind and may be feels like giving up and it will inspire them to keep going. Do you know what I mean? In the face of adversity. I would like to say, I'd just give people hope and inspire people and bounce on their positive stuff like it has today." (Distant Voices, Vox Session, HMP Castle Huntly, April 2019)

"I see this sort of thing as a learning tool. And so, if I can inspire people that's what I want. I want people to think 'if she can do that, then surely there's hope for me'. Even if the people like [justice professionals] could listen to it and I know that's really forward thinking, but they could listen to it and think are 'we are doing the right thing here with people'. (Distant Voices Community Vox Session, July 2019)

"And this song, I'm not saying I'm going to use it, but I can certainly use it to talk about it with people that I understand what they're going through." (Prison Officer, Distant Voices Vox Session, HMP Inverness, Nov 2018)

Similarly, reflections from **KIN** young people indicate their increased ability to effect positive change through art they collectively create with artists. Young people (or sometimes the team) are supported to share their work in schools and other events (conferences, panels, parliamentary events), using the group's collective experience of having a close family member in prison to influence change and understanding, without exposing their individual stories.

"And I want them to feel shocked at all the things they never actually thought of. And I want them to feel an urge or to feel inspired to help someone they know that is in that situation. I don't feel like I could decide what someone should want to know but any question that shows a kind of deeper understanding of what we've been talking about would be very encouraging and it would be good to see people were intrigued by what we are doing." (KIN young person, speaking about the aims of a KIN public workshop, 2018/19)

"I'd like to show that people in prison aren't just criminals but are actual people, like people who aren't imprisoned. They have families and feelings just like anybody else [...]" (KIN young person, speaking about the aims of a KIN public workshop)

"Even though what we've been through has been shit, we're also going to use it to change people's perspective in their life to know, yeah that happens but you'll get there and we can change perspectives in people." (KIN young person)

"... you take yourself out of your comfort zone when you do new stuff like spoken work, writing poems. Obviously we all know we've been through the same thing but like getting our experience out there without saying what our experience is, is really good." (KIN young person reflecting on presenting at the 'Our Time To Be Heard' Conference)

Capacity to navigate transitions

One aim of the **Unbound** community is to ensure a space where people wanting to keep moving forward in their lives are supported to do so, with a community of people who have an understanding or personal experience of the challenges involved after liberation. The nature of this support is often informal and therefore difficult to fully capture (e.g. conversations over dinner that might offer advice, reassurance or signpost to support). Reflections from people who have been part of Unbound after prison suggest the role and importance of a regular community to help their homecoming and capacity to navigate transitions. Important aspects include regular positive activity, creating new identities, making a contribution, forming positive social bonds, etc. – all aspects underpinned by desistance approaches (how and why people stop offending behaviour).

"What it does for me is that it gives me a different direction, a different focus, to take me away from my previous background and to help me to take a different direction in life and to move forward in life in a positive way through music." [...] "Going to places like Vox Liminis, having that in your life as a focus, and to say well next week, next Tuesday I'm

going down to ... [Unbound] and it's just helped me to have a positive focus.” (‘M’ reflecting on Unbound, participant in Community Vox Session, December 2018)

“I’ve learned quite a lot actually. The confidence that I’ve gained from coming into Vox Liminis... And a lot of changes helped me on many levels, not only my confidence, but being able to be in a group. When I used to first come here, I wouldn’t eat because I didn’t feel comfortable enough to sit around... but the last year that I’ve been coming here, it’s really changed, it’s given me a totally different concept. I kind of know what sort of people I should be around, instead of the people that I was around. So it really has helped me on many different levels.” (Vox Session participant reflecting on their time in Unbound community, April 2019)

“So Vox has made it a lot easier, a whole load easier. I didn’t think I would be able to [be welcomed]... apart from my family obviously, I didn’t think anybody would throw me the light of day, because of the seriousness of my crime. And they have never asked me what my crime is, they have never asked, they are not judging me in anyway, which again helped me. So their role in my home coming was pivotal I think.” (‘J’ reflecting on Unbound, participant in Community Vox Session, December 2018)

Increased and/or sustained family relationships

The **In Tune** projects works with families with a parent in prison, and is therefore the project where we most commonly capture positive outcomes around family relationships. Feedback from families indicate that the **In Tune** family sessions provide families with space to enjoy quality time together, the opportunity to learn new things together, and to see each other in a new way despite being in a prison setting. A lot of Mums have expressed that it is the first time they have seen (currently imprisoned) Dad “let go” and just have fun with their child(ren).



In Tune family workshop

The significance of these In Tune sessions for many families is the positive effect it has on the parents' mental health and strengthening the family relationships and bonds; a critical aspect of successful reintegration when liberation comes.

"I've loved every single bit of it. We've never been closer, me and Gordon, to be totally honest, we've never been as close as this." (In Tune family participant, 2018/19)

"It's a lot more relaxed, and the weans get to see me in a different light compared to a normal visit, just getting to do normal things with him like singing to him. I've definitely bonded with him a lot more." (In Tune family participant, 2018/19)

"My relationship with [partner] and kids has felt a lot stronger. I've been able to show sides to me I haven't before and just be a dad, sides to me I didn't even know I had. I feel safer and happier." (In Tune family participant, 2018/19)

Quite often, parents have said that in regular prison visits the kids can find it hard to hold attention and get bored, making the imprisoned parent feel that their children don't want to be there with them. In Tune reintroduces the visit room as a place where they come to have fun as a family - making the visit a much better experience for everyone, forming positive memories, and allowing the imprisoned parent to simply be a parent and bond with their child(ren), and vice versa.

"[Our child] was only in nappies when he came in, so to see [his Dad] getting to do nursery rhymes and things he's never experienced with him has been really special. There definitely should be more stuff like this for kids because in normal visits they don't really get to play together." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

"[Child] has definitely been way happier to come and see Dad since these sessions, he loves how much fun he's having with him. [Dad] also speaks to [child] on the phone far

more often as this has given them something else to talk about - that's helped the two of them so much as well." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

"Well I've learned, basically, that my kid's a number one priority now. And just to keep my head down when I get out and stick by him." (HMP Inverness, Distant Voices Vox Session, November 2018)

Mum and Dad expressed that [the sessions have] had a huge impact on the family as a whole. They felt closer than ever, and felt that even more in the run up to Christmas. Mum and Dad said that music was another thing they could now use at home for fun; both children live with autism which can make communication at home difficult. (In Tune notes, 2018/19)

By doing family In Tune sessions together in a group of five to six families, it also helps the parents and children find further support from other families.

During **In Tune** song-writing workshops, imprisoned parents (sometimes Mums but mostly Dads) get the opportunity to create something special for their families - quite often saying things they haven't said before - which contributes towards sustaining better family relationships whilst in prison.

"They'll love it. My partner will cry when she hears it. I told her yesterday I what I was doing, told her I've been recording a song for the weans and she couldn't believe it, she thought it was great." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

"I've got something my kids can cherish forever, something that I've done for them that maybe not a lot of other people have done for their kids." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

"They'll be on the other side of the phone singing this, and singing it when I'm not there but thinking of me." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

"I know the Mrs is going to hear it and be proud of me, so I think it's going to bring us a lot closer." (In Tune participant, 2018/19)

In the **KIN** project, individual support with KIN young people enable space to speak about their relationships with their family, challenges or transitions related to the imprisonment of their family member. For many of the KIN young people, this is the only space in which they felt they could discuss and find avenues of support.

'M' speaks about how the relationship between her brother and her family has broken down. She speaks about how she is supporting her mum. She is able to speak openly about this and says she doesn't have many places to do that. (KIN observations, 2018/19)

During their 1:1 'S' reflects on his recent visit to his dad. He speaks about his relationship with his father and future plans. RR challenges his comments about his mother. They discuss actions he is going to take to get back on his feet. (KIN observations, 2018/19)

Accessing education, employment and training opportunities

This is an area we observe the least change, due largely to the long term nature of the outcome, and it being less of a direct focus in most of our projects.

However, in the **Unbound** community, we have observed a few instances whereby the support and connections among Unbound members contribute towards us being able to access or maintain education, employment and training opportunities. We anticipate this being an area we can develop further as the Unbound community matures, for example introducing sessional peer support that provides direct support and connections for individuals upon release. Other outcomes we have strong evidence for (improved confidence, communication skills, ability to navigate transitions for example) are necessary contributing factors to access or maintain employment, study or training.

“I think you need employment, and you need a focus, and you need to break the cycle and Vox Liminis gives you the opportunity to move away from negativity and by that I mean your associations and who you associate with. What can improve? I think employment and also a change of your lifestyle.” (‘M’ reflecting on Unbound, participant in Community Vox Session, December 2018)

Public and community engagement in reintegration

While we capture responses from some of our public engagement work (e.g. gigs or events), this is an area we wish to strengthen in future – to better explore the evidence we gather from audiences and understand the effects of engaging people in creative events and conversation.

We also anticipate being able to share more from the rigorous research underway in the Distant Voices project. This will offer deeper insights and understanding of the wider social impact of our work. For example, it seeks to understand the extent and in what ways public dialogue (mediated through music) about re/integration can build connections between people and support re/integration from punishment.

The following two Case Studies are examples of outcomes from our public engagement work in specific **Distant Voices** and **KIN** projects.

Case Study: 'Oblivion and Beyond' public gigs and workshops in Highlands

In October 2019⁶, as part of the **Distant Voices** project, we held a series of three public gigs and two workshops with practitioners to engage people with issues of reintegration (with a particular focus on recovery from substance use).



Donna Maciocia sharing songs and stories from the Distant Voices 'Oblivion and Beyond' EP, public gig in Thurso, 2019

Albeit a small example of our public engagement work, our analysis of responses from these gig audiences and workshop participants (total of approx. 120 people) provides an insight to what people found of value from hearing songs written by people with experience of recovery and/or criminal justice. Overall, the analysis of responses from this specific project showed strong evidence for affecting change and understanding around reintegration.

Overwhelmingly, gig audiences and practitioners in the workshops enjoyed the music and performance of original songs. About two thirds of gig responses indicated strong feelings or emotions in response to the songs; and all workshop practitioners reflected that the stories conveyed in the songs had struck a personal or emotional connection with them. We know that for change in behaviour, there needs first a thought or human connection that has the potential to challenge our beliefs and assumptions about others/issues.

'Oblivion and Beyond' - I thought it wis gonnae be a heavy metal act to start with but it turned out it was fabulous. Well, once I was told what to expect it actually exceeded my expectations, yeh. I thought it could have been quite dreary but it was anything but. - Mr C's public gig

⁶ This project started in the 2018/19 financial year, and continued into 2019/20.

“Very emotional and thought provoking songs. Truly inspirational.” - Recovery Choir

“An opportunity to truly hear what others have and are experiencing. The words had such depth and painted vivid images. Great workshop.” - Practitioner workshop participant

“Strikes a deeper chord, it personalises things.” - Practitioner workshop participant

“Telling the story before the song, the way it brings to life the person and their story and the background and then the songs are really powerful as well.” - Hootenanny public gig

“I really liked Auto Pilot [song] as well, as I felt I could relate to that. The song where somebody had lost their father, somebody else had lost their brother, emotionally I just felt a real connection to that.” - Hootenanny public gig

“Thank you for a wonderful evening of hugely thought-provoking and heartening music. As a recovery nurse it can be difficult fighting other’s self-stigmatisation and low self-worth. I always feel music is a powerful outlet to share thoughts, feelings and journeys. All of the songs are powerful. As a child of an alcoholic who recently lost my father I found the song by Sarah particularly special and emotive. I also loved the song about Ben Wyvs.” - Mr C’s public gig

For some audience members in the public gigs, the experience provided an insight into others’ experience of recovery or criminal justice system. For many people, this was not an experience or issue they’d often thought about. However, ‘gaining new insights’ wasn’t a strong outcome for practitioners in workshops, presumably given their experience and familiarity with the issues already.

“I just thought it was great it was really enjoyable, it was really fun but [the songs] gave me loads of insight into people’s experience of being in prison and their recovery, what it must be like for families. So to roll all that into one, I’m just quite taken aback.” - Public gig audience member

“It was quite interesting to see it’s all about helping people ... getting out of prison must be difficult to actually progressing into normal society ... I actually don’t know any criminals ... aye so it’s not really something that you think about when they come back out ... I’ve had no dealings with people coming out of jail or anything so I’m quite fortunate really but people do struggle ... Yeh it’s a good question so do you actually help these people or do you not help them can you afford to do it... there’s a lot of things to think about.” - Public gig audience member

“No I never thought about anybody doing anything positive like that in prison and I think it’s great to hear their stories actually. I love hearing the stories of people that I meet locally who have done alcohol, done drugs and have turned a new leaf shall we say ... it spoke to me, it reached me, it reached me. I think that’s all you can say and I was entertained.” - Public gig audience member

“Very inspiring definitely makes you think about other people’s experiences you wouldn’t normally hear about.” - Public gig audience member

For gig audiences and practitioners in the workshops, the experience of hearing the songs underlined the value of music as a medium to spark positive change, especially as a tool to provoke thought, conversation, or change in or for others.

“Music and art can really change the way that people think and it’s a great deal for expression and a fantastic medium for change as well.” – Public gig audience member

“Sharing these songs will hopefully make others think about some of the challenges and stigma faced by those who are returning home and battling recovery.” – Public gig audience member

“A fantastic insight into the thoughts and experiences of those in recovery/CJS. Really encouraged to keep going.” – Practitioner workshop participant

“Learning from lived experience with the introduction of music or arts/crafts creates a very different and lasting memory that has a deeper impact on our subconscious and our ability to feel empathy for people.” – Practitioner workshop participant

“It has highlighted to me the important and powerful role of creativity, song writing and music making in building confidence and enabling people (e.g. those in recovery) to connect with others and to see themselves differently. E.g. as a songwriter” – Practitioner workshop participant

Almost all of the responses from practitioners indicated that their experience in the workshop deepened their understanding of good practice, the public health approach to recovery or desistance theory. Practitioners identified learning for them personally, or for the system or role they work in. For example, the importance of hope, connectedness, reducing stigma, seeing the individual beyond the label, working with individuals’ interests/assets and highlighting the role of all of us in supporting recovery or reintegration.

Most practitioners reflected that they felt encouraged, affirmed or inspired in their roles as a result of engaging with the songs.

“[I] learned lots but was also reminded why I love this job and how my professional role fundamentally connects with my values and beliefs. Key reminder/learning point- everyone is human and has the capacity to survive / change/ teach others” – Practitioner workshop participant

“First [workshop] of its kind. Very moving, inspiring and makes me proud to do the job I do.” – Practitioner workshop participant

Some practitioners indicated that the discussions had prompted them to do something new or act differently beyond the workshops. For example, to use music with clients, or a desire to share their knowledge or experience further to prompt conversations with family or others.

“Much more interactive, emotional, motivational, inspiring- my head is buzzing now with ideas” – Practitioner workshop participant

“I have some new words and images and language to use with my clients in our conversations.... Would like this to be the start of something rather than a ‘one off’” - Practitioner workshop participant

“For me it’s the confidence in the values I hold onto at work. Pushing the ‘system’ to view itself differently. Personally, however, it’s the awareness that I need to practice more what I preach.” - Practitioner workshop participant

Overall, the analysis of responses from this specific project - a small part of our public engagement work - showed strong evidence for having increased community engagement in thinking about issues of reintegration.

Case Study: LIMBO – an immersive workshop with secondary school pupils and practitioners

Another example of our public engagement work comes from the **KIN** project, where KIN young people work with artists to make and share art publicly. LIMBO is an immersive workshop designed by KIN young people who have had a close family member imprisoned. The workshop offers a unique insight into some of the consequences for young people whose parents or siblings are sent to prison, and is used to widen public discourse and understanding.

In 2019, 400 secondary school pupils across Scotland took part in LIMBO, as well as teachers, youth work professionals, criminology students and conference delegates from various sectors.

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked to respond to their experience, writing their thoughts to the KIN young people. The following responses are illustrative of how the



LIMBO – immersive workshop exploring the experience of having a family member in prison

workshop was a catalyst for engaging people creatively about the issues and experience of having a family member in prison.

As hoped by the KIN young people, participants felt an emotional response to the work:

“Going through a rough time, at the end of a rough time is happiness, stick in, stay positive, live your life, be happy, I promise you it will get better. Because you are going through a rough time doesn’t mean you block out your loved ones, your friend and society. Stay strong.” (Limbo workshop participant)

Importantly, many indicated they gained insight or better understanding of the experience of having a family member in prison, or about its significance in Scotland (e.g. more young people experience having a family member in prison than parental divorce). Many expressed that they’d not thought about this before.

“I have learned a lot from this workshop today. I don’t think I ever fully realised that it’s not just the person being sent to prison that’s affected. It’s their family too. Even though I only experienced a tiny fraction of what it is like for those families. I think I understand now.” (Limbo workshop participant)

“The workshop created a realistic atmosphere which encouraged us to feel emotions we are all familiar with and can relate to. This helped us to empathise with people facing this

type of tribulation and understand that many people are struggling every day. The people that deal with this are very brave.” (Limbo workshop participant)

“It makes you consider the emotions of the people who have family in prison and when it’s like unknown the future ahead of them.” (Limbo workshop participant)

For some, the workshop enabled them to reflect upon the role of the criminal justice system itself and its effect of processes upon the young person and family members.

“This workshop has made me really think about the penal system in a different light and that it is not only prisoners who are affected by this.” (Limbo workshop participant)

“...the system is almost designed to bring out more frustration.” (Limbo workshop participant)

“It made me realise how bad the prejudice that people receive is. The judgement is really unfair.” (Limbo workshop participant)

Some participants indicated solidarity: a belief that it is an important issue that needs positive change for young people and families in this situation.

“Society should stop making people who deal with this feel so alone.” (Limbo workshop participant)

One of the key aims of the workshop is to influence a change in attitude and behaviour, for example to reduce stigma, offer better support towards peers or others with family member in prison. This effect was indicative in many of the responses. Ideally, we would like to understand whether this change is maintained longer term.

“I never realised how much of an eye-opener this workshop would be. I have never really thought that families with a member in prison would feel so judged and brought down by people who are supposed to help them. If someone feels like they deserve this kind of treatment when they have done nothing wrong, my heart breaks for them. If they continue to spread awareness then I’m sure great changes will happen.” (Limbo workshop participant)

Not surprisingly given the prevalence of people who experience a family member imprisoned in Scotland, some participants responded personally in solidarity for their own situation and experience of having a family member in prison.

“I think people need to know more about family in prison and the effects that it has on people. It has helped me with knowing more because my dad is in prison.” (Limbo workshop participant)

“I can relate to the workshop on a personal level and I found that it made me realise/ understand that there’s always someone going through something worse. I send my love and hope that you get through this tough time stress-free and always tell people how you feel, never be embarrassed.” (Limbo workshop participant)

What next?

This report has provided a brief insight into our wide-ranging work and its significance to the people we work with and in our Vox community.

We look forward to the further learning and insights about reintegration and our work that will be produced through the Distant Voices research project in the coming year.

We recognise there are opportunities to further strengthen how we evidence and communicate what we do and the difference it makes; not only to individuals, but where possible, to capture the possible cultural and systemic changes that we and others in Scotland seek.

We believe these changes, along with the collective efforts of others in Scotland, help contribute towards a fair and just Scotland where people can live fulfilling lives as contributing citizens after punishment.

We invite you to be a part of the work. Visit our website to learn more www.voxliminis.co.uk or get in touch admin@voxliminis.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you.