



The Art of Bridging

Learning resources from the ‘Distant Voices: Coming Home’ project, exploring crime, punishment and reintegration

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Produced with the Distant Voices Community

**DISTANT
VOICES**

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The Art Of Bridging

Introducing The Art of Bridging

The Art of Bridging is a set of learning resources from a project called 'Distant Voices: Coming Home'. Between 2017 and 2021, we explored crime, punishment and reintegration through creative practice, research and community building. Working in and around the Scottish criminal justice system, we tried to understand what it's like to try to rebuild a life after punishment, and how that process could be better enabled. There is a bit more detail about the project in the Appendix at the end of this document.

In Distant Voices, we paired Scottish songwriters with people who have different kinds of experience of the criminal justice system. These included people in prison and after prison, social workers, probation officers, prison officers and governors, as well as others affected by crime and punishment, including the communities and families affected. But, equally importantly, we also built and have sustained a community involving many of these people, in which we rooted our learning and through which we tried not just to study but also to practice reintegration after people have been separated and excluded by punishment, particularly imprisonment.

Distant Voices has taught us a lot about crime, punishment and reintegration, adding substance, nuance and texture to the flattened stereotypes and soundbites that often disable and distort public discussion of criminal justice. It has also provided glimpses of how crime and conflict might be better addressed, through alternative practices and approaches that try to repair harm, rebuild connections and remake communities.

At the end of the project, we summarised a lot of that learning in a six-part podcast series also called *The Art of Bridging*.

You can find it via any of these links:

[On our Website](#)
[On Spotify](#)

[On Apple podcasts](#)
[On SoundCloud](#)

The six learning resources below accompany each of the six episodes, encouraging dialogue about the content, and pointing readers and listeners to other materials and resources from our project and from elsewhere. We hope you will use these resources to generate your own and your group's learning, to develop your own responses, and to draw your own conclusions.

The Art of Bridging is a free, open access resource. All we ask is that you don't seek to exploit it commercially and that you let us know when and how you use it, and how you get on.

Please email any responses to Fergus.McNeill@glasgow.ac.uk

Contributors

In the podcast series, we refer to contributors from the Distant Voices community mostly by their first names. We've already explained above about the diverse kinds of experience and expertise that people brought to the project. Part of what we have learned is that defining any of us by just one aspect of ourselves or our experience oversimplifies our identities and our stories, and it tends to hamper our integration in communities. The key point is that the learning generated in Distant Voices and reflected in these resources is the product of a collaborative effort that draws on our community's diversity.

In these learning resources, we want to continue in this spirit of collectivity and diversity. So, although the overall responsibility for the text in these resources rests with the named authors (Fergus and Lucy), the material and learning we are pulling together here has been generated by our community. At the same time, we want to make it possible for you to follow up on what you hear and read here, and to discover wider bodies of work within and beyond Distant Voices. For this reason, we use some participants' full names or artist names. Here's a cast-list for the contributors to the podcast series, in order of appearance...

Lucy Cathcart Frödén

is a researcher, linguist, community artist, podcaster and collaborative music-maker. She has been involved with Vox and Unbound for many years. She also writes and releases her own music as Raukarna.

Fergus McNeill

is a Professor of Criminology & Social Work at the University of Glasgow. He helped Alison Urie set up Vox Liminis and has been part of the Unbound community and of the Board of Trustees since then. He was also part of the Distant Voices research team.

Iain

is a member of the Unbound community and a graphic designer. He is responsible for the visual appearance of these resources.

Phil Crockett Thomas

is an academic (based at the University of Stirling), artist, and writer. She was the main researcher on the Distant Voices project. She recently edited a book of science fiction short stories on a future without prisons, you can read it at abolitionscifi.org.

Louis Abbott

works for Vox Liminis and was the Creative Lead on the Distant Voices project. He is also the lead singer of Glasgow indie band Admiral Fallow.

Martin

is a member of the Unbound community. His song 'Leap from the Noise', co-written with Ross Clark ('Fiskur') featured on our 2021 EP, Looking at Colours Again.

Sharon

works in the field of Recovery from Alcohol and Drugs Use in the Highlands. She has taken part in or supported much of Vox's work in and around Inverness.

Colleen

is interested in people, evaluation, learning, communities, power, and growing things. She used to work in Vox Liminis and is now a member of the Board of Trustees and is a longstanding member of the Unbound community.

Gus Bear

took part in a Distant Voices songwriting session when he was early in recovery, just learning to be himself. Now, he is studying mental health nursing and working in recovery services.

Oliver Escobar

is a teacher, researcher, and practitioner working at the University of Edinburgh and was part of the research team in Distant Voices.

Alison Urie

is a leader in community development work, the founder and Director of Vox Liminis, and an Unbound community member. She was also part of the Distant Voices research team.

Padraig O'Tuama

is an Irish poet and theologian, who brings interests in language, violence and religion to his work.

Lisa

works for Vox Liminis on In Tune, and leads on community work in Unbound Making Together. She also looks after finance and operational management.

Jo Collinson Scott

is an academic (based at the University of the West of Scotland), a musicologist and multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriter (working under the name Jo Mango) and was part of the research team in Distant Voices.

Gordon

is a justice social worker based in the west of Scotland and a long-standing member of the Vox Unbound community.

How to use these resources

We have tried to design these resources so that they can be adapted and used in a wide range of settings with people who want to learn about criminal justice. We hope that the resources will be used at different stages and levels of education; from school to college to university, in adult and continuing education, in professional education and training, and in informal community settings.

Levels of study

With respect to levels of study related to qualification frameworks, we have tried to draft the resources so that they can be easily adapted to reflect the level at which your group is studying. Indeed, we think this is one of the merits of the kinds of material contained in The Art of Bridging. The discussion and learning that the songs and stories support can be adapted in line with the life experiences and educational backgrounds of those engaging with them.

Disciplines and subjects

In terms of relevant disciplines and subjects to which the resources relate, those involved in designing the project brought with them backgrounds in community learning and development, criminology and criminal justice, music, politics, social policy and social work, and sociology. Different learning resources in the collection draw on these different disciplines to different degrees, and we cover a wide range of themes, so you might like to read the summary that begins each of the six resources to see where and how it might support the kinds of learning you are trying to encourage.


Although the focus of this project has been on crime, punishment and reintegration, these resources may also be of interest to groups with a different focus, such as community development, participatory politics, collaborative songwriting or socially-engaged arts.

The index at the end should also help you find relevant material.

Sensitive topics

The materials in The Art of Bridging engage with some very sensitive and difficult topics – not just in relation to crime and its consequences, but in relation to a wide spectrum of human experiences of love and loss, of hope and despair. For that reason, we strongly encourage you to review the materials you plan to use carefully and to consider whether they are suitable for your group, and to think about whether and how they should be introduced, and what support might be necessary for your group.

Background materials

We have not developed basic background materials that set the scene in terms of the Scottish criminal justice process (or criminal justice more broadly). However, the  [Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research](#) has developed an excellent range of [Learning Resources for Schools](#). We have included below a list of hyper-links to the most relevant of these resources:

You can find it via any of these links:

 [The Scottish Criminal Justice System](#)


[Who's in prison? A snapshot of Scotland's prison population](#)

[Prison life](#)

[The penal system: Community sentences and financial penalties](#)

[Impact of Punishment: Families of people in prison](#)

[What is prison for?](#)

 Other SCCJR resources are still in development. Keep an eye on the website (www.sccjr.ac.uk) for forthcoming resources on:

- Women in prison
- The penal system: Reducing reoffending?

There is one background briefing that we did develop to provide a broad summary of some previous research and scholarship on reintegration after punishment. There is a short summary of that paper available here as a [blog post](#). A more detailed version can also be found here: [The Reintegration Briefing: What do we know already?](#)

How these resources are laid out

For each of the six podcast episodes, in the corresponding learning resource below, we have first described briefly what kind of content is included (in terms of themes, participants, materials).

We then break each podcast into parts; this is intended to make it easy for you to pause and introduce activities designed to encourage your group or class to engage in dialogue with each other and with the material presented. We've suggested a range of possible learning activities below, but you might want to design your own activities to better suit your group or class.

In terms of timings, the podcasts all last about 40-50 minutes, and the activities have been designed to last about the same duration. This means that each learning resource might take about 80-100 minutes in total to work through, if you use all the elements.

However, you can select from among the podcast parts and activities if you have less time; and you can add activities linked to the additional resources if you have more time.

We've also made an index of key terms and themes that are discussed in the episode. This is so that you can quickly find content of interest to you and your group or class; and you can use as much or as little of that content as you like. It also works as a kind of glossary, so it's worth looking there if you come across any unfamiliar words or criminal justice jargon below.

Icons



Indicates a Video



Indicates a Website



Indicates an Audio file



Indicates an Academic paper

The Art of Bridging 1: The Currents

What's in this episode

In episode 1 of [The Art of Bridging](#), we begin by exploring what it's like to re-enter society after a prison sentence. Guided by our host Lucy, Fergus and Iain from the Distant Voices community try to help listeners imagine how coming home from prison might be a bit like crossing a river. We seek to understand some of the currents in that river and how and why they make the crossing perilous. The episode also included a selection of songs written in and around the Scottish criminal justice system, featuring songwriters including Donna Maciocia, Lisa, Shuggie, Jill Lorean, Lee, C Duncan and Eddie.

So, this episode explores the problems of reentry. It breaks down into five parts:

Part One (0:00-11:35): Lucy introduces the podcast series, the guests in this episode and the discussion of problems of reentry. At 6:44, Lisa introduces the song Never Got to Say Goodbye.


Part Two (11:36-17:55): Responding to the song, Lucy and her guests discuss how imprisonment impacts on families; creating problems of loss and separation.

Part Three (17:55-25:12): We explore how the conditions of release licences (e.g. parole) can create vulnerability for people after release and for their families; and we discuss the practical problems people face trying to meet their basic needs.

Part Four (25:12-36:50): We discuss how imprisonment can lead to 'institutionalisation' and the challenges this poses for rehabilitation and reoffending.

Part Five (36:50-41:20): Lucy introduces a song from the archive and we hear responses from some guest listeners.

Episode Themes



- Family
- Institutionalisation
- Loss
- Mental health
- Practical problems after release
- Parole
- Precarity
- Reentry
- Rehabilitation
- Reintegration
- Reoffending
- Release on licence
- Separation
- Supervision
- Time
- Vulnerability

Part One

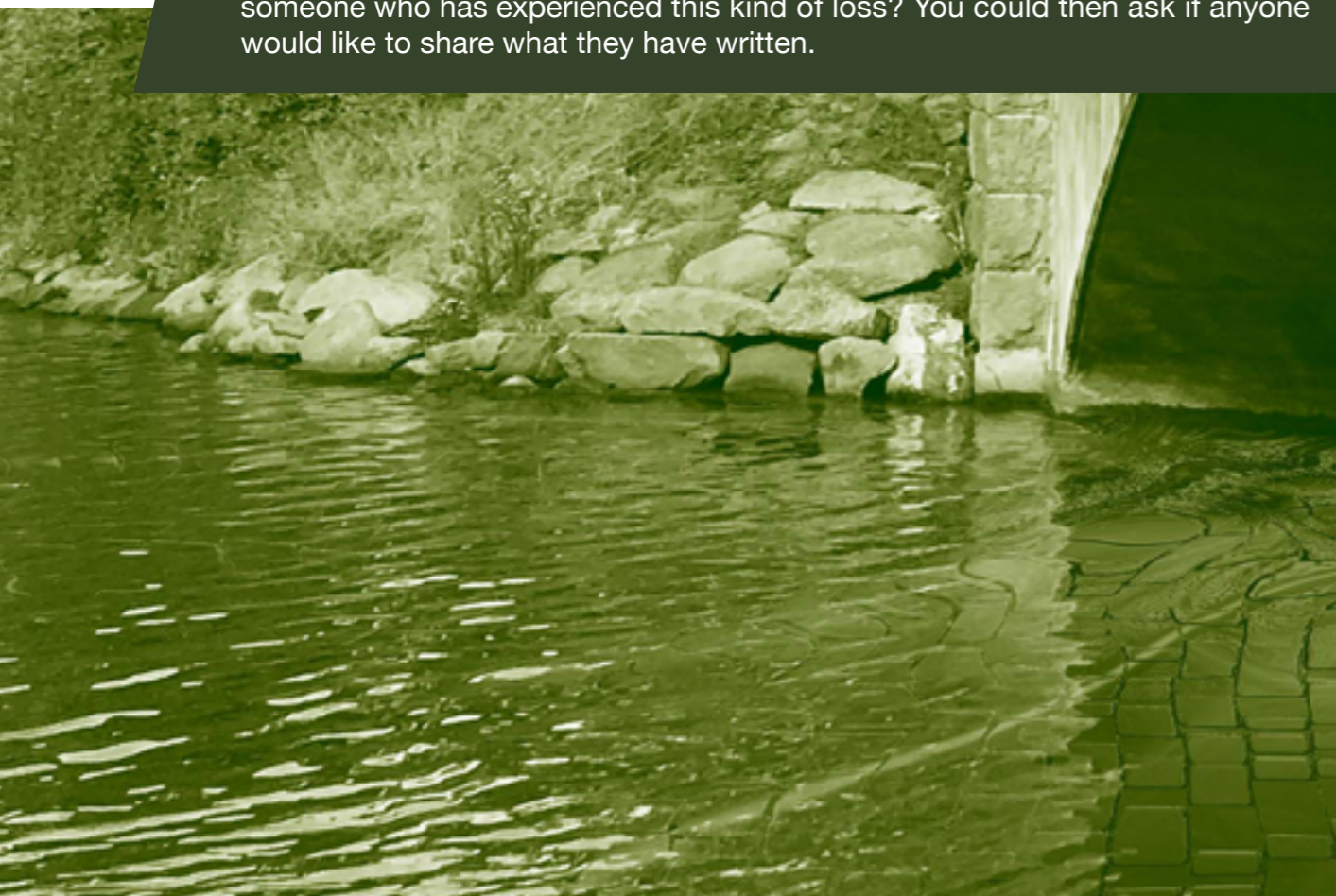
At 00:00-11:35, Lucy steers us through an introduction to the series, to the contributors to this episode, to the creative practices and processes through which we did our work (though this is discussed in more detail in episode 2), and to the first song we discuss.

At 05:50, as Lucy begins the discussion of the problems of reentry (explored through the metaphor of crossing a river), we turn first to one of the songs written in the project, by Shuggie and Donna Maciocia, and introduced here by Lisa (from 6:44), called Never Got to Say Goodbye.

It is worth noting that this song is written from the perspective of someone who has lost a parent while in prison. Discussions of both parental loss and the experience of familial imprisonment may be sensitive for some members of your group, so you might want to consider in advance how to approach this.

Activity 1 (10-15 minutes)

Rather than returning directly to the podcast, perhaps you ask the group to write a brief response to the song in the form of a postcard? What would you write to someone who has experienced this kind of loss? You could then ask if anyone would like to share what they have written.



Part Two

From 11:36-17:55, we hear how Lucy, Fergus and Iain react to hearing the song again. The discussion focuses firstly on themes of loss and separation.

Activity 2 (10-15 minutes)

You could pause after listening to Part Two and ask members of your group to reflect on the discussion so far. For example, Fergus mentions how his own experience of loss and grief during the Covid-19 lockdown changed how the song affected him and how he related to the writer. Perhaps split your group into pairs and invite them to discuss how the experience and position of the listener might affect how a song is heard. Invite them to feedback any insights to the larger group.

Part Three

At 17:55-25:12, the discussion moves on to explore the barriers to reintegration that people often face on release. Iain and Fergus discuss challenges that arise from being subject to post-release licence conditions (e.g. via parole orders) that restrict people's movements and activities; and how these restrictions impact not just on released people but also on their families. In this discussion, themes of vulnerability and precarity also emerge.

Iain goes on to explain the practical problems that some people released from prison face even with getting ID, setting up a bank account or registering with a GP; and Fergus discusses the delays and frustrations that people face trying to meet their basic needs, for example by securing benefits (or 'public assistance') and finding a place to live.



Part Four

Jill introduces the song Autopilot at 25:12, a song that she co-wrote with Lee.

Activity 3 (10-15 minutes)

Again, rather than returning directly to the podcast to hear how Lucy, Fergus and Iain react to this song, perhaps pause after the song and invite comments and reactions from the group. What did they make of the song? What thoughts and feelings did it provoke? What lines of lyrics or aspects of the music stood out for people? Depending on the size of your group, you may want to split them into groups of 4 or 5.

Prompted by listening to Autopilot, at 29:11-36:50, Iain, Fergus and Lucy discuss problems of reentry related to institutionalisation. As Iain says, people have to learn how to be a prisoner to survive imprisonment, and this is not an easy thing to 'un-learn'. This leads on to a discussion of contemporary rehabilitation and its limits, and of how reoffending is understood. Fergus talks about the 'paradox of punishment'; i.e. that it supposedly aims to make things right or better, but often ends up making them worse. In conclusion, Lucy poses the question: what needs to change?

Activity 4 (10-15 minutes)

At the end of the conversation you've just heard, Fergus uses the metaphor of a house for the criminal justice system. He says that 'the house is built on the wrong foundations, and redecorating the rooms isn't going to make anything better'

In small groups, imagine that you are part of a community where prison in its current form does not exist. Design some ways in which your community might respond to crime and its consequences differently. Try to engage a range of skills, including empathy, reason and creativity.

Finally, find a metaphor for what you have designed – what does it look like? What is your alternative to the 'house on the wrong foundations'.

Part Five

From 36:50-41:20, Lucy introduces an important feature of the podcast series: Each episode ends with a song from the archive (often in the original demo form recorded during the songwriting session in question); songs that mostly have not been shared publicly before. Lucy also shares collected responses to these songs from podcast listeners. In this first episode, Chris introduces Am I Dreaming, a song he co-wrote in an open prison with Eddie, who was close to release from a long sentence. We hear responses from Hector, John, Lindsey and Shona.

Further resources



In our project's concluding (online) festival [Bridging the Void](#), our opening gig (recorded live at Chem19 recording studios) was titled [Mapping the Void](#). It explored similar themes to those discussed above. Fergus hosted the gig, which features 6 songs performed by and discussed with Louis Abbott, Donna Maciocia, Tom Gibbs and Joe Rattray. You might ask your group or class to watch and listen to the gig before you work through this learning resource together.

Early on in the project, we produced a brief summary of what was already known about reintegration after state punishment, partly so that we were better placed to judge what was novel about our own learning. You can find the summary here: [The Reintegration Briefing: What do we know already?](#)



The first academic publication from the project was a paper called [Reintegration, Hospitality and Hostility](#). As well as introducing the rationale for the project and our approach, it discusses the hostile environments that people often face after state punishment, and how practices of hospitality (even in penal spaces) might mediate that hostility. In a book chapter, called [Time After Time](#), we used the song Autopilot (and other songs from the project) to explore the complex relationships between time, prison and reentry.



The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR) has published briefings on the [Impact of Punishment: Families of People in Prison](#) and on [Getting it right for families affected by imprisonment](#). These are excellent sources for digging more deeply into these topics. You could also take a look at the website of the Vox Liminis project [KIN](#) – a collective of 14-25 year olds affected by the imprisonment of parents or siblings which has produced a wide range of creative and challenging materials. Another Vox Liminis project, called [In Tune](#), provides opportunities for parents in prison to connect with their co-parents and children outside through music-making.

In an earlier draft version of these learning resources, we had considered giving them the title 'Afterlives'. Saidiya Hartman (2007), in her work on the 'afterlife of slavery', argues that the racialized violence of slavery still has enduring and real effects in the contemporary USA, long after people enslaved there were formally freed. Drawing on Hartman's work, Reuben Miller, a Chicago-based friend of our project, used that concept in his brilliant book [Halfway Home](#) (2021), which is subtitled Race, Punishment and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration, highlighting how the racialized violence of mass incarceration also endures long after imprisonment ends. You can watch Reuben talking about his book in this [SCCJR Lecture](#).



The SCCJR has released a video entitled [Just Talk: Is there life after state punishment?](#), hosted by Fergus and featuring criminologists Shadd Maruna, Reuben Miller and Marguerite Schinkel. It explores many of the themes discussed in this episode, drawing on the research and scholarship of the four contributors.

The Art of Bridging 2: The Stepping Stones

What's in this episode

In Episode 2 of the podcast, Lucy is joined by Martin, Louis and Phil Crockett Thomas from the Distant Voices community, to chat about what happens in a Vox songwriting session, and about how songs might hold potential to work as 'problem-solving devices'. We hear tracks that express complex themes of protest, solidarity, survival and care, featuring co-writers Emma, Ashley, Louis Abbott (Admiral Fallow), Phil Crockett Thomas, Martin, Ross Clark (Fiskur), Tracey and Claire McKay (Martha Ffion).

Part One (00:00-07:04), Lucy summarises what we learned in the first episode and introduces the focus of this episode and her guests, Martin, Phil and Louis.

Part Two (07:04-17:12): we hear the song The Queen's Hotel and learn about where, how and with whom it was written.


Part Three (17:12-21:18): Lucy and Phil discuss Phil's conceptualisation of songs as problem solving devices that can sometimes help people resist or rework the pain that punishment causes for them.

Part Four (21:19-34:22): Martin shares his song Leap from the Noise, reflecting on how it was written and (later) studio recorded. It explores themes of noise, silence and tranquillity. Louis outlines the songwriting process as it unfolds across the 2 or 3 days of a 'Vox session', as well as discussing how the sounds of prison sometimes find their way into the demo recordings.

Part Five (34:23-38:10): Lucy and Phil discuss how the project's Core Group became involved in making TREEs (Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries) and, by way of example, Phil shares one of the poems from her collection Stir, based on her research notes.

Part Six (38:10-47:12): Lucy introduces another song from the archive, Satellite, which reflects on virtual visits and the importance of connection, before summing up the episode. But she leaves the last word to Martin, who shares how the effects of his song Leap from the Noise continue to ripple through his life.

Episode Themes



- Alienation
- Care
- Connection
- Creative writing
- Family
- Listening
- Mental health
- Noise, silence and tranquillity
- Pains of imprisonment
- Poetry
- Protest
- Reoffending
- Research methods
- Resistance
- Solidarity
- Songs as problem-solving
- Songwriting
- Survival

Part One

In the opening section (00:00-07:04), Lucy reminds us of what we learned from the first episode, noting the bleak picture of reentry prospects that it revealed. She notes that the rest of the series aims for a more positive focus on what can help, even in these bleak circumstances. She introduces her guests – Martin, Phil and Louis – and explains the focus of this episode on how creative practice might represent one way that people in prison can create ‘stepping stones’ across ‘the currents’ discussed in episode 1 – for themselves and others.

Part Two

At 07:04, Lucy invites Phil to introduce a song, The Queen’s Hotel, written by Emma and Ashley with Louis and Phil in a Vox session in prison. The song begins at 07:48.

Activity 1 (5 minutes)

You could pause at this point and ask your group to choose between listening to the podcast version of the song, which is the original demo recording made in the prison-based songwriting session, or watching a video of a live performance of it. If you have time for a longer activity (15-20 mins), you could even share both versions of the song and ask your group to discuss how they differ in terms of their sound and their impact on the listener.

[You can watch the live version at 28:45 of this video on YouTube.](#)

At 11:38-17:12, Lucy and her guests discuss the song. Phil and Louis explain how they co-wrote the song with Emma and Ashley, two women doing time in prison who had become friends. Phil explains how Emma reconnected with creative writing in the process (after a negative previous experience) and Louis recalls the joyful, raucous recording of the song in a tiny room in the prison. Lucy notes the mix of the light and the dark in the song, recalling the song Autopilot, discussed in episode 1. For Martin, the song is very evocative of aspects of his experience of being in prison.

Activity 2 (10 minutes)

The title of the song – The Queen’s Hotel – engages with the idea, often expressed in the media, that nowadays prison is too easy and too comfortable. Perhaps ask your group to briefly debate that idea, not just in light of the content of this song, but of their discussions from the last session.

Part Three

At 17:12-21:18, Lucy broadens the discussion out to explore how and why people sometimes take the opportunity, in Vox sessions, to write songs that somehow resist the pains of imprisonment. Phil, who worked as the Research Associate on Distant Voices, discusses her idea of songs as ‘problem-solving devices’ that can sometimes help people resist or rework the pain that punishment causes for them. They do this in two main ways; firstly by mediating relationships interrupted or disrupted by imprisonment, and secondly by creating or re-writing narratives that help make sense of difficult experiences and prepare people for reentry.

Part Four

At 21:19, Martin introduces his song Leap from the Noise, co-written with Ross Clark (Fiskur).

Activity 3 (5 minutes)

Again, at this point you could pause and ask your group to choose between the audio-only studio recording of the song on the podcast, or a video of a live performance of it.

[You can find the live performance at 09:45 in this YouTube video.](#)

At 25:46-34:22, Martin explains more about how the song was written with Ross Clark in an open prison, and about his experience of the studio recording process of his song for the 2021 [EP Looking at Colours Again](#). Phil also shares her memories of Martin’s discussion of the song’s themes of noise, silence and tranquillity, and Louis talks about how prison sounds sometimes find their way into the demo recordings. Louis also outlines the songwriting process as it unfolds across the 2 or 3 days of a Vox Session.

Activity 4 (10 minutes)

Perhaps pause the podcast at this point. Vox sessions often start the process of generating ideas for song themes and lyrics through the use of visual images. We ask people to pair up and walk around a series of flipcharts, on each of which we have posted a picture linked to the sessions theme (Martin mentioned ‘happy place’ as the theme of the session where he wrote Leap from the Noise). To illustrate and experience this (in an abbreviated form), why not give your group the same theme (‘happy place’) and ask them to write down short phrases stimulated by the image for this podcast episode of a swan by a stone causeway reaching out into the sea (see page 22 below) Gather as many as you can and ask the group if any of these lines suggest a story or a theme for a song, or song lyrics.

Part Five

At 34:23-38:10, Lucy talks about how the Distant Voices Core Group (a group of people with diverse forms of experience and expertise and which guided the project) got involved with TREES: 'Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries' (which we also discuss in episode 5). These TREES were one way in which we gathered our learning. Phil shares a poem from her collection [Stir, field works from the Distant Voices project \(2020\)](#), which was inspired by notes she had taken while conducting the research. At 35:54, she reads her poem Bower Bird, 2 which is part of that collection. Lucy and Phil note how the poem describes how people sustain connection with the outside world, and with others in prison, partly through their creativity, despite them being represented (by the prison system) as disengaged and disinterested.

Activity 5 (10 minutes)

Consider splitting the group into groups of 2 or 3 to read and discuss Bower Bird, 2. Something that makes this poem very effective is its observations of small, tangible details which give the reader a visual sense of the scene. Choose one phrase that stands out, and discuss why. In your small groups, experiment with writing your own short poem (4-8 lines) using your chosen phrase as the first line, and adding to the scene with other sensory details from your imagination. Your poem doesn't have to rhyme or follow any rules – there are no wrong answers in poetry! Here's the poem in written form:

Bower Bird, 2

Tame
the robin
might still
be there:
visiting or red-breast up
under a
running machine.

The women don't use the gym.
Sat in tracksuits coloured grey
as pumice
like their food, no water
will be squeezed from these stones
that smile shyly
some scatty as schoolgirls.

Rapt hands press out scissor-free decoupage
tender attention to scenes of normal life
signs of struggle nonetheless.

Loaves of bread are milled by the rain
as they shiver on silver carts outside the hall
abandoned in a sudden shower.

We inspect
pale sandwich fillings that have been hastily spread
the contents restrained by cling film.

Almost charmed by the glitter on the floor
a sprinkling
These chairs cannot be weaponised.

We are singing in the broom cupboard.

Count the pens back into the bag and
moisten the dust.

Paper kittens, hearts and flowers –
The bird is gone – bedecked in decoupage or binned.




Part Six

At 38:10-47:26, in the final segment, Lucy introduces another lesser-known song from the archive: Satellite. Claire McKay (Martha Ffion) introduces the demo version of the song, voicing the words of her co-writer Tracey C, who explains that Satellite was inspired by virtual visits in prison, and reflects on the importance of family contact. The song plays from 39:39. From 43:22, guest listeners Martin (not the same Martin who is in conversation with Lucy in this episode) and Pauline offer their responses to the song. Martin reflects on how, for some people, there is a revolving door at the prison gate; and how important it is that the problems that lead to imprisonment are addressed, if the cycle is to be broken. Pauline relates to the songwriter through her own experience of separation from her grown-up children.

After Lucy sums up what we've learned about 'stepping stones', at 46:04 Martin reflects on some of the ripples that his song Leap from the Noise has caused. He notes how the song helped lead to his involvement with the Vox Unbound community, which has provided a support network for his own social reentry after imprisonment.

Further resources:

We published two academic journal articles that develop Phil's ideas about songs, songwriting and problem solving. Each paper comes with its own short playlist (featuring the songs discussed within the paper). The two papers are available online (free and open access) via these links:

 [Mediating Punishment? Prisoners' Songs as Relational 'Problem-Solving' Devices](#)
[Re-writing punishment? Songs and narrative problem-solving.](#)

We also wrote two blogposts related to these papers. The first post by Phil, explains how the concept of problem solving devices came out of her analysis: [How To Do Things With Songs](#) (2019). The second post by Fergus, summarises the two papers in plain language: [Songs, Songwriting and Problem Solving \(2021\)](#).

Phil's collection of poems based on her research fieldnotes is available and free to download here: [Stir: field notes from the Distant Voices project \(2020\)](#). If you want to know more about the collection or writing 'sociological poetry', there is a journal article about the collection available (free and open access) at: [Crockett Thomas P \(2022\) Stir: Poetic field works from the Distant Voices project. Crime, Media, Culture \(18\)1, 40-51.](#)

In the project's Bridging the Void festival, the first of our lunchtime conversations involved Fergus and Phil in conversation with Dr Kate Herrity (University of Cambridge) about the festival's opening gig, about Phil's work on problem-solving, and about prison sounds. That 50-minute conversation can be found here: [Confronting the Void](#).

At 28:00 in that film, we also include a short film made by Eilidh Munro with our Core Group member Martin, in which he discusses his powerful sculpture Non sum qualis eram.



The Art of Bridging 3: The Foundations

What's in this episode

In Episode 3, Lucy is joined by Sharon, Oliver, Colleen and Gus from the Distant Voices community, to share songs and stories from a project that took us to Inverness to work with local communities on themes of addiction and recovery. We'll reflect on identity, inequality, fear and hope, with songs featuring co-writers Gus Bear, Donna Maciocia, Ross Clark (Fiskur), Gabi Frödén (Foreign Slippers / Fires of May), and Martin, as well as insights from guest listeners William, Jim and Rachel. We'll glimpse cherry blossom, white-tipped waves and new beginnings, as we try to figure out how to build bridges with solid foundations. Please be advised that this podcast conversation and one of the songs features prominent usage of the f-word.

Part One (00:00-14:45), Lucy introduces the episode, her guests and the focus of this episode on recovery from alcohol and drug related harms. This segment ends with a song called Fuck it Button, co-written by Gus Bear and Donna Maciocia when Gus was early in his recovery process.

Part Two (14:45-20:26), Sharon, Colleen and Oliver discuss their responses to the song, exploring issues around identity, change, vulnerability, reintegration and inequality.

Part Three (20:27-30:32), Sharon, Colleen and Oliver share memories and highlights from the work in Inverness and the Highlands, focusing mainly on the conversations and dialogue provoked by our sharing of the songs on the Oblivion and Beyond EP in a range of settings.

Part Four (30:33-41.27), Gus Bear introduces a second song, 'White Horses', co-written with Ross Clark about two years after Fuck it Button. The song reflects on how far he has come in his recovery journey, and stimulates discussion of hope, fear, vulnerability and solidarity – and of the power of sensory experiences.

Part Five (41:28-49:55), Lucy introduces another song from the archive. The Mountain Way co-written by Martin with Gabi Frödén explores his experiences as an army veteran and of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We hear responses from some guest listeners, before an important final word from Gus Bear brings this episode to a close.

Episode Themes

Addiction
Change
Community
Dialogue
Family
Fear
Hope
Identity
Inequality
Mental health
Personal change
Practitioners
Prevention
Post-Traumatic Stress
Punitive attitudes
Recovery
Reintegration
Substance use
Vulnerability

Part One

From 00:00, Lucy introduces this episode, explaining its focus on ‘the foundations’ – on thinking about how as a society we can build strong and secure ‘bridges’ that enable reentry and reintegration. She introduces three more members of the Distant Voices community – Sharon, Oliver and Colleen – who were involved with the project’s work in Inverness. The guests discuss songs they have been listening to recently.

Colleen explains how we worked with the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, using songwriting and public sharing of songs to prompt public conversations about recovery and its complexities. She mentions the EP on these themes – [Oblivion and Beyond](#) – that we released in 2019 and which we toured in the Scottish Highlands, both in conventional music venues and in workshops with people with lived experience, with practitioners and others. We did this to try to spark conversation and change the culture in which recovery takes place; recognising that drug and alcohol harm are issues of public health and inclusion that can affect and are affected by all of us.

Sharon notes how important it was to the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership to try to involve communities to support recovery, challenge stigma and open up public conversation about these issues.

At 08:33, ‘Gus Bear’ introduces the song Fuck It Button, which he wrote with Donna Maciocia at HMP Inverness, coming into the prison from a recovery centre quite early in the process of his own recovery. The song plays from 10:10-14:45. If you prefer a live performance of the song, introduced by Donna, and recorded as part of the Closing Gig of our project’s festival, is available at 39:28 in this [YouTube video](#).

Activity 1 (20 minutes)

Split your group into pairs. Ask them to list as many reasons they can to explain why recovery from problematic alcohol or drug use might be so difficult. In particular, ask them to focus on what role social or community reaction to people attempting recovery might play in provoking someone to press the ‘fuck it button’.

Imagine you are trapped in a cycle of problematic alcohol or drug use, and tempted to press the button. Who would you reach out to in your community for help, and what response would you find helpful from them?

Or a more creative option:

Imagine you are trapped in a cycle of problematic alcohol or drug use, and you reach out to someone in your community for help. Write a short piece of dialogue that shows what kind of response you would hope to receive when you reach out.

Part Two

At 14:45, Lucy and her guests respond to the song. Oliver notes how the song itself is a conversation – both within the individual and with the community. Sharon discusses the way that people mask their problems and struggle with establishing a new identity, as they experience personal change. She talks about vulnerability in that process and the uncertainty of recovery. Colleen discusses the metaphors that people use in thinking about recovery; and what they say about the identities that are available to people in recovery. Oliver connects this to the wider questions the project has raised around structural and systemic injustice - questions such as whether reintegration is possible in highly unequal societies, which do a poor job of integrating people in the first place. He asks how we can move towards long-term prevention rather than short-term reaction.

Part Three

At 20:27, Lucy invites her guests to share a moment or a memory from the project. Sharon discusses two of the gigs that she attended where the songs were shared. One was in a bar, the other in a hall for people in recovery and their families. She found the second gig especially moving, with some of the songwriters in the room. Some of the feedback that night confirmed that, even for those close to the recovery journeys of their loved ones, the songs generated new understanding and connection. Lucy comments on how songs in the project have often helped to disrupt assumptions and to allow people to explore and share different (and sometimes unexpected) aspects of themselves.

Colleen talks about a gig in a bar in Thurso, noting how some of the audience were clearly drawn into a very deep engagement with the songs and the performances. For one audience member, this was linked to how he saw his own experience reflected back in the songs and stories of others. Another man talked about how he had been encouraged to think – for the first time – about life after prison and support that people might need.

In another bar gig, Oliver noticed how the audience split into three; the inner circle of people connected to and invested in the project, a middle group who may have heard something about the project before, and an outer circle of those who were discovering the project only through the gig. He recalled a long conversation with two men who wanted to ‘push back’, expressing more punitive attitudes to crime and justice. By the end of the conversation, he felt that they had recognised the complexity of the issues and the risks associated with simplistic narratives. That, he says, is an important first step in the process of finding collective solutions to complex problems.

Oliver also recalled a practitioner workshop, where the participants expressed appreciation of how the music helped to create a different sort of space where they could bring more of their own humanity into the dialogue. Lucy and Oliver discuss the importance of moving beyond the ‘flattened’ stereotypes and binaries (e.g. guilty or innocent, victim or offender, etc.) often associated with discussions of crime and justice.

Activity 2 (20 minutes)

Split your group into sub-groups of 4 or 5. Ask them to discuss the extent to which and ways in which people in their own social networks might respond to some of the songs we have shared so far? More generally, do they think people are open to actively supporting recovery or reintegration, or do they prefer to avoid these issues, or do they express more hostile or punitive attitudes?. Whatever their answers, ask them to discuss what might drive more supportive and/or more hostile attitudes to people in recovery and/or people returning from prison.

Part Four

At 30:33, Gus Bear introduces another of his songs, this time co-written with Ross Clark (aka Fiskur). White Horses was written a couple of years after Fuck it Button, by which time Gus's life was very different. He had completed treatment, found work, established a new relationship and become a father. In the introduction, he also discusses the feeling of community he experienced in the songwriting process, and reflects on how far he has come and how much his life has changed.

At 38:12, Lucy and her guests react to the song. They note the new hope in the song, but also how fear is also part of the story. Oliver remarks on how fear is sometimes mobilised in the political sphere. He asks how fear might be an engine of solidarity rather than division; for example, how might we respond to the fear that we are losing people because we aren't responding to drug and alcohol related harms in the right ways? Sharon notes again how recovery entails vulnerability – putting yourself back out there, in pursuit of a brighter future. She also notes how the song uses powerful sensory images – connecting this to the power of the sensory in recovery processes.

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

In the large group, invite responses to White Horses and to the discussion of it in Part Four. 'Recalling Fuck it Button, what are the group's reflections on the differences between these two songs, and what that might tell us about Gus Bear's recovery?'

Part Five

At 41:28-49:55, Lucy turns to another song from the archive, The Mountain Way. Gabi Frödén introduces the track, which she co-wrote with Martin in HMP Castle Huntly. The song reflects on his experience as an army veteran, and of his experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Guest listeners Jim, Rachel and William offer their responses.

The episode ends with an important and inspiring final word from Gus Bear.

Activity 4a (20 minutes)

Invite the group to use this time to explore and discuss some of the resources listed below – for example, you could discuss why veterans are over-represented in the criminal justice system and how this might be addressed.

OR


Activity 4b (20 minutes)

Alternatively, if you would like to end on a creative note, why not write a group poem? An easy way to do this is to ask everyone to complete the following sentence (choosing one of the sensory words):


'I imagine that recovery feels/tastes/smells/looks/sounds like...'


In this episode, we've heard about cherry blossom and white-tipped waves, for example. Use your imaginations and try to find interesting metaphors. Give everyone a sticky note to write their line on, and then put them all together into a poem.


Further resources

 The Oblivion and Beyond EP is available on all the usual streaming services and is available on the Vox Liminis website [here](#). The Vox website also features this short


 [STV News feature on the songwriting workshops in HMP Inverness.](#)


 The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research recently published this report on [Mapping Drug Use, Interventions and Treatment Needs in Scottish Prisons](#), by Maria


 Fotopoulou and Sarah Armstrong. SCCJR has also published this resource on [Drug Crime](#), which explores the relationships between drugs, crime and criminal justice.

 [Rights, Respect, Recovery](#) is a 2018 report by the Scottish Government which sets out its strategic approach to reducing alcohol and drug use, harm and deaths.

 This 2021 story in [The Conversation](#) discusses Scotland's very high rates of drug deaths. It includes a link to this related [BBC Newsnight](#) story.

 This 45-minute film from Turning Point features a talk by Professor David Best, exploring the relationships between [Community connections, recovery and reintegration](#). It focuses on how communities can help and hinder reintegration.

 [British veterans in the criminal justice system](#) is a short video published by the Guardian in 2009 which explores how and why 20,000 veterans (at that time) ended up in the criminal justice system.

 If you'd like to know more about Oliver's thinking about political and public dialogue, this report is an excellent place to start: [Public Dialogue and Deliberation](#).



The Art of Bridging 4: The Columns

What's in this episode

In Episode 4, Lucy's guests include Lisa, Alison and Pádraig from the Distant Voices community, and we hear a set of poems, called [A Casual Kindness](#), written by the Vox Unbound Community with Pádraig Ó Tuama as part of a project called Making Things New. Woven together from everyday observations and encounters, this multi-layered poetry collection gives glimpses of the pressures, the despair and the hope of new beginnings after prison. Lucy and her guests reflect on how creative practice can help spark connections between people with very different life experiences, and ask what poetry can do in the face of systemic violence.

We'll also hear some excerpts of the recent [Echoes EP](#) from the Vox Unbound Community, written with C Duncan, Kris Drever and Jonnie Common, as we think together about how the bridges we build can have strong columns that reach from foundations in connected communities towards broader processes of social change.

Part One (00:00-08:09), Lucy introduces this episode and her guests, and invites Alison to explain a little about the Making Things New project.


Part Two (08:10-19:21), we hear readings of a first set of poems co-created in this process, and Alison, Pádraig and Lisa comment on what stood out for them from these readings.

Part Three (19:22-36:09), Lucy invites Pádraig and Alison to say more about the creative process through which the poems were written, before we hear a second set of poems.

Part Four (36:10-42:18), the discussion moves on to explore how the poems were used in workshops with criminal justice policymakers and professionals to try to help imagine change. Pádraig shares some thoughts on how poetry might help to address systemic violence and oppression, by opening up spaces of empathy and of critique.

Part Five (42:19-50:56), Diana, Brunilda, Martin and Graeme are our guest listeners, responding to another song from the archive, Nothing Sacred, written and performed by Andy Robertson with help from our host, Lucy.

Episode Themes



Boredom
Community
Community and collaboration
Conflict resolution and peace-making
Creative writing
Empathy
Identity
Masculinities
Oppression
Parole
Poetry
Policymakers
Power
Practical problems after release
Practitioners
Systemic change
Systemic violence
Time

Part One

Lucy begins by summarising the previous episodes. She also explains the focus of this episode; on exploring how creative practices can help spark connection – both between people and between communities – as part of broader processes of social change. She introduces her guests Lisa, Alison and Pádraig.

At 05:37, Alison introduces the Making Things New project, which was part of the wider Distant Voices project, but also based within the Vox Unbound community, which meets every week. In the project, Pádraig helped the members of the community write poems reflecting on their experiences, with the aim of engaging people who might influence change in criminal justice in Scotland. She explains how the poems were written, and how they were shared in workshops with criminal justice policymakers, politicians, journalists, practitioners and leaders of justice organisations, who were also invited to respond creatively.

Part Two

At 08:10-19:21, Lucy introduces the first set of the poems from the project, read by members of the Unbound community. This set plays from 08:21-13:23. Immediately afterwards, Lucy and her guests reflect on the poems. Their discussion engages with several themes in the poems: how it feels to return to a place which has changed in your absence; feeling alienation and dehumanisation; navigating the bureaucratic and systemic demands made of people undergoing post-release supervision or seeking assistance; problems of identity; experiences of time, of boredom and of repetition. Pádraig discusses the use of two poetic forms (Villanelle and Pantoun) which helped to communicate these everyday experiences of prison and reentry.

Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Invite two or more volunteers to identify the poem that most affected or most interests them. Divide your group into smaller groups so that each group discusses one of the poems identified with the person who suggested it. Ask them to pay attention both to the words and the form, and then to feedback to the larger group how they think the poem helps us understand the writer's perspective and experience. What further questions does the poem provoke? (Allow 10 minutes for the group discussion and 5 minutes for the feeding back).

Part Three

At 19:22-36:09, Lucy invites Pádraig to say more about how he facilitated the creative process. In doing so, he also explains how identity emerged as a strong theme in the group's discussions and writing. Lisa recalls how the creative process enabled the development of strong relationships between people with very different life experiences. Alison discusses the importance of hospitality – specifically in the making and sharing

of meals, and in sharing songs, in the in-between times, when the group weren't working on their poems. She also shares a story about how, in the conversations that followed the residential, listening to one of the poems sparked a recollection in Martin (a member of the Unbound community) of the importance of one specific, everyday encounter with a prison officer that allowed him some dignity at a moment of vulnerability. That recollection led to the writing of another poem, Bad Letter Day, which we hear as one of a second set of poems which plays from 25:22-32:20. Bad Letter Day plays from 28:13-30:30.

In responding to this set of poems (from 32:20-36:09), Pádraig notes how questions of love, masculinities and homophobia emerged in the creative process. Alison comments on the encounters between people in the poems (some imagined, some real) – she notes how full of possibility and danger these everyday encounters can be. Lisa notices how friendship and compassion emerge in this set of poems, in contrast to the dehumanisation in some of the first set. She also discusses how victims are heard in the poems.

Activity 2a (15 minutes)

Bad Letter Day engages with many of the common themes in this set of poems. Either on the large group, or in smaller groups, ask people to reflect on why the experience that the poem communicates was so important to Martin. Ask if anyone would like to share similar everyday experiences (in any setting) of recognition, dignity and compassion that made a difference to them. How does this kind of experience affect the relationships between people who occupy different positions in structures of power and authority?

OR

Activity 2b (15 minutes)

Encourage people to write a short piece of erasure poetry in response to Bad Letter Day. In advance, print out one page of dense text (from almost any source) for each participant. You could use a page of a newspaper, or of one of the academic papers or policy reports to which we have hyperlinked in this document. Give each participant a page and ask them to examine it, looking for a few words or phrases that strike them in some way. Circle these words and phrases. Look for other words in between that might combine with them in interesting ways. Circle them too. Then score out the rest of the text, leaving visible only your chosen words and phrases. If you'd like to see examples, you can do an image search for 'erasure poetry'. You should end up with a poetic piece that might highlight unexpected connections or combinations. Ask for volunteers to read their poems.

To assist with these activities, here is the text of Bad Letter Day:

Bad Letter Day

I saw my sister's writing
on the letter.
Sitting in the hall
surrounded by all the other men
— those serving sentences
— those watching those serving sentences
I felt my body trembling
as I tore it open.

All I saw was words.

Dog
Dead
Dog
Dead
Dog
Dead

I couldn't read the sense
in what was senseless.

I couldn't calm my mind
for all the noise from all the boys
with their spoons and forks and knives
and clattering of plates and
practicing of petty hates and rivalries.

I stared at the place
where the sunlight hits the wall
Hoping it would all go away.
I was eighteen and brave
not eighteen and crying.

Maybe people saw, maybe not.
We all got news from home from time to time
news of people dying, news of change,
news of debt and death and worry.
My sister wrote to tell me that my dog was dead.
And I was gulping sobs instead of casserole.

I'd been told I shouldn't cry inside.
You sometimes heard a fella try to hide his weeping
maybe late at night, or you saw him fighting back his
tears while men make lots of noise.

Bad letter day? I heard the officer say.
I looked away, but not for harm, I used my arm
to wipe my face.
Take the afternoon, son, he said,
nobody will hear you in the cell.

I went,
I walked the quiet corridor
I closed the door,
I fell on to my bed
and cried
because my dog had died.

I tried to think of how to thank the man who
gave my privacies some privacy.
He'd be long retired now, a gentleman, a golfer,
a man from up the Highlands,
If I found him, I could shake his hand and thank him.
If I wrote to him, I'd write to him
and say he gave me
dignity that day.

If I saw him I could thank him
for the way he made my bad day
the kind of bad day
I'd survive.

Part Four

At 36:10-42:18, Lucy moves the discussion on to how the poems were used in workshops with a wide range of people professionally involved with criminal justice. Alison describes how the use of collaborative songwriting in these workshops, in response to the poems, allowed people to step out of (or at least back from) their formal roles and positions. She notes how even those most associated with 'the system' don't identify with it, which begs important questions about how we go about changing it.

Lucy invites Pádraig to discuss his experience of conflict resolution and peace-making, asking how that can be applied to the systemic violence that the criminal justice system causes. He talks about how language has developed through processes that create categories, and about how power operates in this process, sometimes doing great harm. What poetry offers is a way to listen, to explore language, and to develop spaces of empathy and of critique – spaces that take seriously the words, accounts and experiences of people who are often silenced by systems that discredit them. But Pádraig also notes that no art form serves only one purpose: These are poems of critique and of celebration, of lament and of beauty. Whereas criminal justice, he argues, has a 'fixed imagination', art uncovers the unexpected, especially when pursued collaboratively, sometimes interrupting and disrupting systems of oppression.

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

In the large group, invite responses to Pádraig's observations about what poetry offers in the face of systemic violence and/or oppression. What does it mean to say that criminal justice has a 'fixed imagination'? Why might that be a problem and how can it be changed?

Part Five

At 42:19-50:56, Lucy introduces another song from the archive, this time one written and performed by Andy Robertson, with Lucy's help. Nothing Sacred reflects on his experience as a victim of crime. We hear responses from guest listeners Diana, Brunilda, Martin and Graeme, who discuss how surprisingly, given the context, Andy's words and music communicate empathy, interconnectedness and embodiment.

Activity 4 (15 minutes)

Imagine a scenario where someone has stolen something from you, and you later have the opportunity to have a conversation with them. What would you ask them, and what might they answer? Write a short script for this scene.

Further resources



The poems heard in this episode have been published by [Tapsalteerie Press](#). Keep an eye on the website of [Vox Liminis](#) for 'a free, open access version' of the collection. You can also find a bit more information there about the [Vox Unbound](#) community. This episode also featured excerpts of a recent EP from the Vox Unbound Community, written with C Duncan, Kris Drever and Jonnie Common. You can find it here: [Echoes EP](#)



If you'd like to know more about Pádraig Ó'Tuama's work and writings, you can look at his website: www.padraigotuama.com.



In our Bridging the Void festival, which ended the Distant Voices project, one of our lunchtime conversations (on 'Foundations') focused in part on Making Things New, as well as engaging with the work of episode 3 guest Oliver Escobar on 'everyday practices of democratic repair'. Here's the link: [Foundations \(Conversation 2\)](#).



Some of the collaborative processes underpinning the poetry writing are reflected on in [Reintegration, Hospitality and Hostility: Song-writing and Song-sharing in Criminal Justice](#).



The Art of Bridging 5: The Beams

What's in this episode

In Episode 5, Lucy talks with Jo and Gordon who take us on a behind-the-scenes journey into the making of a unique piece of gig theatre from the Distant Voices project. It isn't essential, but this podcast and the associated learning resources might best be used after you and your group or class have watched the show which runs to 1 hour and 47 minutes. Here is a link to [A Giant on the Bridge](#) on YouTube.

In the associated podcast episode, we find out more about TREES (Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries) and how they helped generate dialogue between people and perspectives in the making of the show. We also hear what happens when restorative justice meets songwriting, and how this kind of encounter can shed new light on professional practice in criminal justice. Along the way we hear songs co-created by Rachel Sermanni, Frank, Jo Mango, Louis Abbott, Gordon and others, as we try to understand how making things together can help us reach out across uncertain, conflicted, in-between spaces; like the beams of a bridge.

Part One (00:00-08:05): Lucy introduces her guests, Jo and Gordon, and explains the focus of this episode on creative collaboration and bridge-building, between stories, identities, reality and fiction, the personal and the political. Jo explains what A Giant on the Bridge is; part-gig, part-theatre piece.

Part Two (08:06-18:54): Lucy, Jo and Gordon explore the early origins of A Giant on the Bridge in the development of TREES (Tiny Research Enquiries and Explorations) through which we explored responses to songs on our 2018 album Not Known at This Address. We hear one of these songs: Frank's Song.

Part Three (18:55-30:29): Jo and Gordon share their recollections of a songwriting workshop in Belfast with restorative justice and mediation practitioners, where the practitioners explored dialogue between songs, and helped produce new songs in the process. Jo introduces one of these songs, Resolution.

Episode Themes

Creative writing
Dialogue
Family
Fiction and reality
Hope
Identity
Mediation
Mental health
Performance
Poetry
Research methods
Restorative justice
Practitioners
Stories
Victims

Part Four (30:30-39:30): Jo explains how the Covid-19 pandemic frustrated our plans to premiere theatre performances of A Giant on the Bridge in April 2020, requiring us to innovate and adapt whilst still in isolation. She explains how the monologues in the show develop into dialogue with one another, before the interwoven stories find their resolution. Gordon also discusses how being involved with the wider project has affected him, perhaps producing another kind of resolution.

Part Five (39:31-52:40): The song from the archive is Gordon's song The Weight of the Sky, performed by Jo. Gordon explains how the song reflects on mental health difficulties, and the guest listeners, Arianne, Jake and Laura offer their responses.

If you decide to watch the film together before listening to the podcast, here's a suggestion for how you might structure a discussion of the film.

Activity 1 (20 minutes)

Invite people to choose one of the characters from the film:

D – the man returning home from prison

June – D's sister, who has been looking after his daughter while he was inside

Faye – D's young daughter

Clem – the prison worker who struggles with her job and the effects of harm from crime

Gerda – the long-imprisoned Giant who gains her freedom

The Young Prince – who frees and then banishes the Giant

Louis – the songwriter who guides songwriting in prison settings.

Activity 1 (continued)

Cluster them in small groups of 3-5 according to their choices. Ask them, in these groups, to do the following:

Discuss why they chose the character they did.

Identify and discuss the songs or monologues relating to that character or their experience that they liked or found interesting.

In what ways, if any, did the character's story challenge or change their thinking about crime, punishment or reintegration?

Across the show, each of these characters' stories comes to be interwoven into a dialogue with the others. At first the performers stand alone and deliver monologues about the characters, but as the show progresses they are drawn further into the circle and in the end, into dialogue with each other.

How did the story of the character you chose come to be in dialogue with that of another character? Was there any resolution for them?

Bring the group back together and compare notes across the characters/groups.

Part One

From 00:00, Lucy introduces her guests Jo and Gordon from the Distant Voices Core Group. She also explains the focus of today's episode, which continues the themes of creative collaboration and bridge-building; focusing on 'the beams' that reach out across uncertain, in-between spaces, bridging between stories, identities, reality and fiction, the personal and the political... all explored through discussion of A Giant on the Bridge.

At 05:24, Lucy invites Jo to explain what A Giant on the Bridge is – a kind of mixture between a gig and a piece of theatre, where songs from the project are interwoven with storytelling, via rap, poetry, monologue and fairy tales. A Giant on the Bridge was co-created as a way of distilling the learning from Distant Voices – the stories and the characters are rooted in the experiences of people involved in the project.



Part Two

At 08:06, Lucy takes us back in time to explore the development of Giant, starting in 2018, when the project's album, *Not Known at This Address* was released (it is available on all the usual streaming platforms, as well as on our website here: [Not Known at This Address](#)). She introduces Frank's Song, co-written and co-performed by Frank and Rachel Sermanni, which plays from 09:05. At 13:19-15:23, Gordon offers his response to the song.

- You can find an alternative video of the song here: [Frank's song \(live\)](#).
- You can also find a short video (2 minutes, 30 seconds) in which Rachel discusses the writing and recording of the song here: [Rachel Sermanni on Frank's song](#).

At 15:24, Lucy talks about how, back in 2018, the Core Group set out to respond to the songs on *Not Known at This Address*, and to explore their meaning, and how they were experienced as they found their way to various listeners. Jo explains how we did this through the development of TREES (Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries), many of which included responses to Frank's Song. Out of this came the theme of difficult conversations involved in trying to bridge different perspectives. Including those of victims or families affected by crime or punishment. In turn, this led to an exploration of how dialogue between these different perspectives can be enabled, especially when positions and perspectives seem far apart.

Activity 2 (15 minutes)

Either individually (in writing), in small groups, or in the larger group, ask people to reflect on Frank's song. If they had been in the project's Core Group, what kind of TREE might they have designed to explore this song's meaning and/or its reception? These Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries can take any form – in *Distant Voices* they included conversations with friends, sharing songs on online forums and gathering responses, and creative responses like podcasts, poetry and songs. You can find out more about how our approach to TREES was developed here: [Introducing TREES \(a method\)](#).

At 18:55, Lucy invites Jo and Gordon to discuss how this led them (and others) to begin to engage with restorative justice (RJ) ideas and practitioners of mediation. Jo explains how this sparked the idea of putting different songs from the project into dialogue with one another and asking practitioners at a workshop in Belfast, 'If these songs were people, and you were facilitating a meeting between them, how would you do it?'

Gordon shares his memories of that workshop and the impact it had on him. As a criminal justice social worker his day-to-day work focuses on people caught up in the system as 'offenders'. Engaging with those working closely with victims taught him a lot and deepened his interest in restorative justice. Jo recalls how important the workshop was in offering hope that dialogue, restoration and reconciliation might be possible. This stands in contrast to a justice system which often seems to silence people, including those most affected.

At 23:48, Jo introduces Resolution, a song that she co-wrote with Louis as part of the Belfast workshop, with the assistance of those who took part; the song explores the practice of mediating dialogue. It also features in *A Giant on the Bridge* where it plays at 01:25:28. The monologue that precedes it (from 01:23:00) places the performance in the context of Clem's story, one of the interwoven stories in the show.

Activity 3 (20 minutes)

Activity 3 (20 minutes): The lyrics of Resolution are reproduced below. In pairs, ask your group to discuss both the sound of the song and its words. What do both of these things communicate about the challenges of mediating conflict and about the art/skill of listening?



Resolution

I set the table as well as I could
I best-guessed the order of chairs and
Measured the mood of the
Stopwatch carpet and sunflower drapes
I re-read the stories and brushed up on the names

The want to be heard
Are you ready?
We can do this anywhere you want

But there's a place we can meet in
With asking, with answering
A seat we can sit upon
To be listened and to listen

I gave you a name when I was letting off steam
But there's no time to stop and think of how
This weighs on me
One speaks to another – your worst to your best
That feeling doesn't have a word
It doesn't have a name yet

The want to be heard
Are you ready?
We can do this anywhere you want

But there's a place we can live in
With asking, with answering
A seat we both sit upon
To be listened and to listen

Don't you find sometimes it's hard to imagine
Beyond what is presently here?
Don't you find sometimes it is hard to abandon
The lies that have wound themselves everywhere?

We believe we can move from redacted
From flattened people
To detail and resolution
Filling the silences
Or leaving them...

Part Four

At 30:30, Jo explains how the first Covid-19 lockdown frustrated plans for the premiere of *A Giant on the Bridge*, and how the musicians adapted, recording their individual contributions to a version of performance in isolation in their own homes. She also explains more about the lyrics in the song *Resolution* and how they draw on a story that one of the practitioners related in the workshop. Gordon notes how the lyric 'the want to be heard' speaks of the importance of listening and how carefully the practitioners prepared and practiced listening. Jo also recalls how the practitioners used musical terms related to tuning, tone and rhythm to explain how mediation works. She describes how the individual monologues in *A Giant on the Bridge* develop into dialogue as the show progresses, mirroring the mediation process.

At 34:31, Lucy invites Gordon to comment on his wider experience of *Vox Liminis* and *Distant Voices*. His first participation in a songwriting workshop was a powerful and liberating experience, in which he wrote his first song. This led to him attending *Vox Unbound* regularly, where he enjoys being there not as a social worker but simply as a member of a community forged around shared interests in criminal justice and creative practice. As a result, he finds himself in a different kind of relationship with justice-affected people; not there to 'supervise' them or 'manage risk' but simply to engage with people as they are, and to get to know them. His involvement helped Gordon to revive and reinforce his original motivations for being a social worker. Jo notes that his experience resonates with the double meaning in the song title *Resolution*, which refers both to finding a resolution or settlement, and to seeing things in a new way, in greater detail.

At 38:09, Jo discusses our plans for sharing *A Giant on the Bridge*, perhaps as a live show, later in 2022. But even if this can't happen, the filmed version that we showed in the project's closing festival (*Bridging the Void*) in November 2021 will be made freely available online.

For now, users of these resources can access the full film via this private link:



[A Giant on the Bridge \(film version\)](#).

Part Five

At 39:31, Lucy introduces a song from the archive and this week's guest listeners, Arianne, Jake and Laura. Gordon introduces his song *The Weight of the Sky*, which reflects on mental health-related difficulties, noting how writing songs can provide a safe way to process and share complex emotions and experiences. From 42:40, we hear Jo's performance of the song. The guest listeners respond from 47:53.

At 50:18-52:40, Lucy summarises and concludes this episode.

Further resources

Users of these resources can access the film via this private link:



[A Giant on the Bridge \(film version\)](#).

Jo's blogpost about the thinking behind TREEs can be found here:



[Introducing TREEs \(a method\)](#).

There are many other interesting posts on her blog: [Pop As Research](#).



Much more information about restorative justice can be found on this website of the European Forum for Restorative Justice: [EFRJ website](#).



In the last of our Bridging the Void festival conversations, Jo discusses 'A Giant on the Bridge' from 02:00-27:03. You can find that conversation on YouTube here:



[Building Bridges \(conversation 3\)](#).



The Art of Bridging 6: The Land

What's in this episode

In this final episode of The Art of Bridging, we recap on our journey so far, explore some of the challenges we faced along the way and what we can learn from them, and then we reach the other side, the dry land – or do we?

Part One (00:00-13:18), Lucy introduces this final episode and provides a recap of the previous episodes.

Part Two (13:09-24:12), we review some of the struggles and challenges we faced in the project, mostly related to the structures and cultures that mean that power is distributed unequally, meaning that certain stories and certain voices tend to be privileged over others. We also hear a little about the Sounds of Solidarity project, through which Vox Unbound has tried to stay creative, collaborative and connected, even through lockdowns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Part Three (24:13-42:32), Lucy explains the activity through which we leave the final word(s) to members of our community, simply asking people to complete two sentences... We end, of course, with a song, Waiting for the Daylight.

Episode Themes

Community
Creative writing
Cultures
Dialogue
Hope
Hospitality
Identity
Inequality
Media
Pains of imprisonment
Poetry
Power
Solidarity
Structures
Systemic change

Part One

Lucy introduces the final episode explaining its three-part structure. First, we recap the previous episodes, then we hear about the challenges we faced along the way, and then we hear a range of voices from the Distant Voices and Unbound communities.

In the recap, Iain and Fergus remind us about the complex problems that imprisonment creates (01:28-03:45); strong 'currents' in the fast-flowing river we seek to bridge. Phil, Louis and Martin discuss how people in prison, even before release, struggle against these currents, solving problems and seeking or making 'stepping stones' that might help them, and others, across (03:45-05:59). Sharon and Gus discuss processes of recovery, and what supports people to lay the 'foundations' for a bridge that can take them to a different future (06:00-08:04). Pdraig and Lisa remind us that creativity itself can provide the 'columns' that support and sustain connection, even in the face of systemic violence (08:05-10:53). Finally, Jo and Gordon, share how creative processes and practices can enable dialogue, providing 'beams' that span the divide, perhaps offering some resolution to the disconnection that crime and punishment causes (10:54-13:00).

Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Individually or in pairs, ask people to highlight the most surprising, the most disturbing and the most inspiring things that they have learned from the podcast series. Invite some volunteers to feedback.

Part Two

From 13:09-22:30, Lucy discusses some of the challenges and struggles that we faced in the Distant Voices project, noting that some of the most important learning is to be found here. She discusses how systems and structures associated with academia sometimes proved difficult to navigate. For example, the pressure to pursue and evidence individual merit in academia, and to meet the demands of universities and of research funders can conflict with the collaborative and community-focused aspects of a project like ours. The music industry also imposes certain constraints on how work is promoted and distributed, and the media tends to be focused on individual, personal and sensational stories. Sometimes the media only wants to hear about established artists or musicians, and sometimes journalists only want to hear the stories of individual 'offenders' or 'prisoners', reinforcing one-dimensional identities.

Lucy notes that we also had to work hard to think about and clarify who owns the things that we make together – whether songs, poems or academic articles. And we've had to confront the complexity of critiquing a system (or set of systems) that we nonetheless want to access and work within.

Quite often, whether dealing with criminal justice, universities or the media, we felt as if we were trying to work against the structures and cultures which constrained us. There are parallels here with the constraints that make reintegration so challenging. By seeing 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration' as projects of personal responsibility, they erase or downplay the role that inequality plays, and they attach simplified and stigmatised identities onto people trying to move on. Lucy argues that resistance to these pressures involves creating collective stories that we can all be part of; stories of solidarity.

In this vein, at 22:31, Lucy explains that the songs that have been playing in this part of the podcast were generated through experiments in collaborative songwriting (at a distance) during lockdown. She directs us to a series of blogposts and songs from this project that can be found here: [Unbound Sounds of Solidarity Project](#). These blogposts and songs reflect in part on our continuing struggles with the questions of power and in/equality raised in this section.

Activity 2 (10 minutes)

In the larger group, invite discussion of the issues of power, inequality and individualisation discussed in this section. On a large piece of paper, make a collective mind-map of how some of these issues connect.

Part Three

In part three, Lucy thanks the many people who have contributed to the project and the podcast series. Looking to the future, she asks people in our community to complete two sentences:

To build bridges, we're going to need...
On the other side, we're going to find...

Activity 3 (5 minutes)

Before we hear the responses in the podcast, pause and ask people (privately) to complete these sentences on two separate sticky notes or post-cards. Collect the cards or notes.

From 25:58-37:52, we hear responses from William, Lynn, Lisa, Andy, Fergus, John, Gordon, Steven, Pat, Colleen, Phil, Mark and Alison, as well as the thoughts of people who came along to our Bridging the Void festival in November 2021 and made a collaborative poem via similar prompts. The poem is voiced by Louis.

Activity 4 (15 minutes)

Work with the group to collate the cards or notes, perhaps in the form of a poem of your own.

Just before we hear these responses, at 25:33, Lucy introduces the song that will follow them, with which the series ends: *Waiting for the Daylight*. The song plays from 37:53. These are the lyrics:

Waiting for the Daylight

We walked the tightrope
hanging over the land
Kept me floating,
the tension I felt,
holding me up

I felt the lowest notes the most
hanging in the grey
You left behind a shadow, a shape
Waiting for the daylight, the daylight

Charcoal palm trees
beyond the reach
Closest to the post
and the space between us
Reachin' up

I felt the lowest notes the most
hanging in the grey
You left behind a shadow, a shape
Waiting for the daylight, the daylight

And when the light turns where will we be?
Blinking back the hope in a new country
And when the light turns in this place we see
We had everything we needed,
have everything we need.

Further resources

You can keep in touch with the ongoing life and work of the Unbound Community via the Vox Liminis website here: [Vox Unbound](#). As noted above, the blogposts and songs from the solidarity project can be found there too:

[Unbound Sounds of Solidarity Project](#). There's also the recent [Echoes EP](#).

In the last of our Bridging the Void festival conversations, as well as Jo discussing *A Giant on the Bridge*, you can hear more reflections on the project from Lucy (at 36:20) and from Fergus (at 51:40), as well as a response from the sociologist Les Back (at 01:22:36). You can find that conversation on YouTube here:

[Building Bridges \(conversation 3\)](#).

The festival's Closing Gig – [Bridging the Void: Moving On Together](#) – features live performances and discussion of more songs, and concludes with Louis introducing and the band performing *Waiting for the Daylight*, from 48:59.



Index



Theme	Episodes	Definitions (where appropriate)
Addiction and recovery	1 (drug deaths on release), 3 (changing the culture; challenging stigma; recovery as a public health issue), 6	By 'addiction' we mean chronic and serious problematic substance use, which the user feels unable to control. By 'recovery', we mean progressing away from that condition. For some people 'recovery' involves abstinence, for others it involves more controlled substance use
Alienation and dehumanisation	4, 6	Alienation refers to social processes by which people are treated as if they are different from others, so that they feel they don't fit in. Dehumanisation means that people are seen as and treated as somehow less than fully human. These processes involve or imply being excluded from aspects of social life.
Audiences	3 (reaction to song performances)	
Boredom and repetition	4	
Community	3 (community support in recovery; community feeling in songwriting workshops)	
Conflict resolution and peace-making	4	Processes by which conflicts between people and/or groups and/or communities and/or societies can be discussed and resolved without violence.
Creative writing	2, 4, 5, 6	

Dialogue	3 (how practitioners react to songs), 5 (dialogue and reconciliation), 6	Literally, a kind of communication that allows a flow of meaning between people, often when issues and experiences are being explored together. Related to conversation (turning things over or around by talking about them) and discussion.
Distant Voices Core Group	2, 5, 6	The diverse group of people with different kinds of experience of criminal justice (lived experience, professional experience, academic experience, artistic experience) who guided the Distant Voices project.
Everyday encounters	4	
Family	1 (parent-child relationships, familial imprisonment), 2 (virtual visits), 3 (family support in recovery), 5 (families affected by crime and punishment)	
Fear	3	
Grief and loss	1, 4	
Hope	3, 5	
Hospitality	4 (cooking and eating together)	The practice of welcoming people into any social group or space.
Identity	3 (establishing a new identity), 4 (in creative writing), 5 (stories and identity), 6 (one-dimensional identities in media representations)	Personal identity relates to the ways in which we see and understand our selves (who we are) and social identity refers to the ways we are seen by others).

Inequality	3, 6	The uneven (and often unfair) way that any kinds of social goods or resources or opportunities are distributed.
Influencing systemic change	4, 6	By 'systemic change' we mean changes in the criminal justice system which are significant enough to alter the nature, character or operation of the system.
Institutionalisation	1 ('unlearning' how to be a prisoner)	The process by which institutions change people, often involving the creation of a dependency on the institution (and its routines) to function in daily life.
Listening	2 (sounds in prison); 5 (listening in mediation)	
Making Things New	4	One of the sub-projects of Distant Voices which involved a group of people writing poetry together.
Masculinities and homophobia	4	Masculinities refers to the ways in which people interpret and practice what it is to be a man or to be male. Homophobia refers to the fear of people who are gay; it is often associated with other negative feelings and actions directed towards gay people.
Mental health	1 (emotional detachment), 2 (finding your 'happy place'), 3 (PTSD in army veterans), 5 (songwriting as a safe way to process complex emotions and experiences)	They are many definitions of mental health. Leaving aside technical medical terms, by mental health we mean a state of wellbeing in which people are not experiencing psychological distress and feel able to function well both as individuals and in society.

Metaphors	3 (metaphors for addiction and recovery)	Metaphors are figures of speech in which words or phrases that relate to one thing are used to describe or illustrate another. For example, 'religion is the opium of the masses', as Karl Marx said.
Music and songwriting	1, 2 (songwriting workshops; songs as 'problem-solving devices'), 3 (how music creates a different kind of space; sensory images in songwriting), 4 (how writing music together enables people to engage differently), 5 (creative collaboration and bridge-building), 6 (music industry; authorship and ownership; collaborative songwriting in lockdown).	By 'narratives', we mean stories that try to make sense of and contain experiences.
Narratives	2 (how songs help people make sense of difficult experiences), 3 (risks of simplistic narratives), 5 (reality and fiction; personal and political; fairy tales), 6 (collective stories of solidarity)	
Pains of imprisonment	2, 6	

Parole (and/or probation)	1 (post-release licence conditions), 4 (post-release supervision; bureaucratic demands)	In the UK, the term 'probation' used to refer to a particular measure that courts sometimes used, under which people would be placed under the supervision of someone (a probation officer or justice social worker) in the community. Sometimes this measure was used instead of a prison sentence. Different conditions could be applied to such orders which have now evolved into Community Orders in England and Wales and Community Payback Orders in Scotland. 'Parole' refers to a similar practice but applied to people being released from prison, after having served the custodial part of their sentence. In some countries, 'probation services' provide both kinds of supervision, but in Scotland these functions are fulfilled by local authority social work organisations.
Performance	5 (gig theatre)	
Personal change	3	
Poetry	2, 4 (how poetry creates spaces of empathy and critique in the face of systemic violence), 5, 6	
Power	4 (language and power), 6 (in partnership working; in academia, the media and the music industry; in creative collaboration)	

Practical problems after release	1 (Getting ID, bank account etc), 4 (appointments, relationships, jobs)	
Practitioners in criminal justice	3 (practitioner workshops), 4 (an encounter with a prison officer; workshops with professionals), 5 (social worker perspective)	
Precarity	1	Precarity refers to a state of being in which a person is left continuously in a vulnerable and uncertain position.
Prevention	3 (preventative approaches to addiction and recovery)	
Punitive attitudes to crime and punishment	3	Attitudes to crime and punishment that focus on imposing harms and deprivations (or pain) on those who have committed offences.
Recording process	2	
Rehabilitation	1 (limits of rehabilitation), 6 (not just about personal responsibility)	Rehabilitation has many meanings and, confusingly, can refer to both processes and outcomes. Its most common use (in English) refers to processes or interventions which aim to somehow change people so that they won't offend again. But it also refers to the restoration of a punished citizen's legal status (which is closer to the literal meaning of being 're-clothed') and to successful reintegration in the community (implying acceptance and belonging).

Reintegration	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Better understanding the meaning and nature and practice of reintegration have been key concerns in this project. But, in simple terms, reintegration refers to being returned to and reconnected within a community or society from which you have been separated.
Relationships	2 (how songs mediate relationships disrupted by punishment), 4 (how being creative together connects people with very different life experiences; empathy, friendship and compassion), 5 (difficult conversations)	
Reoffending	1 (paradox of punishment - prison makes things worse), 2 (problems causing reoffending)	To offend again. Slightly different from reconviction, which is to be convicted again. The term 'recidivism' is often used to refer to reoffending and/or reconviction.
Restorative justice	5	'Restorative justice' (RJ) is an umbrella term for a wide range of practices that typically aim to mediate a dialogue between offenders, victims and/or their loved ones and/or representatives (and sometimes communities), in order to allow for understanding, apology and reparation, where possible. Sometimes RJ is an alternative to 'traditional' criminal justice; sometimes it works alongside it.
Separation from loved ones	1, 4	

Solidarity	2 (solidarity between prisoners), 3 (solidarity in the face of inequality and oppressive systems), 6 (stories of solidarity)	Another complex concept that we have been exploring in the project. In simple terms, it refers to strong bonds of reciprocal (or mutual) concern for one another in social groups.
Songs as 'problem-solving device'	2	
Sustaining connection	2	
The 'system'	1, 4 (systemic violence; how even those most associated with 'the system' don't identify with it), 6 (intersecting systems, structures and cultures that constrain)	A shorthand term for the criminal justice system, though, in fact, there is no single 'criminal justice system' organised as such. Rather there is a complex set of criminal justice processes involving a large number of different and separate organisations and practitioners (e.g. police, lawyers, courts and judges, social work, prisons, etc.).
Time	1, 4	
Tiny Research Explorations and Enquiries (TREEs)	2, 5	These are explained and discussed in episodes 2 and 5 but, in essence, they were small mini-projects by which we explored what we were learning in the project in a variety of ways.
Victim perspectives	4, 5	The perspectives of those directly impacted by offending behaviour.
Vox Unbound	2, 4, 5, 6	The regular and ongoing community of people involved with Vox Liminis, which meets every Tuesday evening.

Vulnerability	2 (vulnerability in creativity), 3 (vulnerability in recovery), 4 (dignity at a vulnerable moment).	A state in which we are open to and at risk of being hurt in some ways, but also a state which allows for people to connect and become close.
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Appendix

Aims and Research Questions

THE WIDER DISTANT VOICES PROJECT began in 2013 as a collaboration between Vox Liminis and the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research at the University of Glasgow. In 2017, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number ES/P002536/1), the partnership extended to include the Universities of Edinburgh and the West of Scotland in 'Distant Voices: Coming Home'.

These were the aims of the project

1. to improve academic and public understandings of re/integration into society after punishment;
2. to develop innovative practices to better support re/integration; and
3. to better engage a range of citizens, communities and civil society institutions in re/integration.

These were the research questions that the project tried to explore:

1. How do individual citizens and civil society institutions experience, make sense of and engage in re/integration after punishment -- whether as citizens 'coming home' or as those receiving them?
2. How and with what effects does making and sharing art (principally songs) (a) represent and (b) support re/integration? How can we best understand the social, political, ethical and aesthetic nature and potential of these encounters and what they reveal about re/integration?
3. To what extent and in what ways can culturally mediated public dialogue about re/integration enable the development of social relationships and connections, supporting citizen and civil society engagement in re/integration?
4. To what extent and in what ways does participation in co-creative enquiry and public dialogue stimulate wider individual and community participation in other aspects of social and political life beyond the question of reintegration (e.g. policy processes, elections, community action)?



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