Bullingdon Community Connections

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HMP Bullingdon Community Connections Pilot

Final Evaluation Summary

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Introduction

The HMP Bullingdon Community Connections Pilot Project (BCCP) was launched in November 2022 to address the challenges people face on being released from prison in order to reduce reoffending. Its overall aim has been to build positive interconnections between the prison and the community that will support the rehabilitation of individuals, using three main approaches:

1. Initiating new projects and partnerships between the community and prison to open up opportunities for purposeful activity and individual support;
2. Facilitating effective working: assisting services to navigate the best route to delivery through introductions, connections, system navigation, information-giving and support for colleagues and partners;
3. Enabling and supporting Prison Officers to link individuals to services that offer social and emotional support on release.

The project has two staff; a custody-based prison officer (Community Connections Officer) and a community worker (Community Coordinator) based at Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action (OCVA).

This document summarises the key findings of a four year evaluation conducted by Russell Webster.

The work of the project

BCCP has been successful in initiating over 40 initiatives and activities for people in Bullingdon prison. These range from small arts and crafts activities such as the fortnightly origami sessions held in the prison library; to sports sessions designed to connect people in prison to their home communities; to larger scale projects such as the painting of a 70 metre mural on a prison corridor (featured on the cover of this report); to new gardens where prisoners work regularly growing flowers and vegetables; to a Departure Lounge which provides a range of practical services, information and support for prisoners on their day of release. This last initiative now helps more than half the people released from HMP Bullingdon in the first few hours of their resettlement journeys.

The extent of the activities delivered has grown consistently over time with an average of nearly 275 hours per month in the first nine months of 2026, compared with 200 hours per month over the same time period in 2025.

BCCP has also been successful in raising funds to support these activities, leveraging over £190,000 through a range of approaches.

Stakeholder views

More than forty individuals from a wide range of agencies were interviewed for this evaluation and shared a common view that the project has been overwhelmingly successful. In particular, the pilot has:

- Substantially increased the range of support services available to prisoners at HMP Bullingdon;
- Engaged many more community organisations (of all sizes) in the work of the prison;
- Developed a network for community organisations wishing to provide services to people in prison;
- Improved the co-ordination of many key mechanisms and processes, particularly those focused on resettlement;
- Linked the prison more closely with the Oxfordshire community within which it sits;
- Leveraged additional funding and resources for a wide range of projects and services;
- Generated a feeling of positivity among prison staff and community organisations that it is possible to initiate and maintain a range of positive activities within HMP Bullingdon;
- Disseminated its findings and secured the interest of both HMPPS and many individual establishments in replicating the BCCP mode.

That the project has succeeded in achieving this range of outcomes during a period in which both HMP Bullingdon and the entire prison system has been under-resourced and has faced continuously growing demands is remarkable to say the least. The prison itself has been so pleased with the project that it is in the process of taking over responsibility for funding the prison-based worker from November 2026.

Replication

The overall aspiration for the Community Connections project has always been to test and prove an effective concept for enhancing the involvement of community organisations in prisoners' resettlement journeys (both while incarcerated and on release). The current model has been tried and tested over a four year period and has succeeded in becoming such an integral part of the prison regime that successive governors at HMP Bullingdon have committed to fund the prison-based worker out of their own budgets going forward.

There has also been considerable interest from both the central and regional management of HMPPS and a number of individual prison establishments. There is a strong consensus among the HMP Bullingdon senior management team, the BCCP Steering Group and the

evaluator that the impact of the project is to a large extent attributable to the fact that it has been owned by the prison from the start and that it has been co-created to meet the particular needs of HMP Bullingdon and has evolved to address new challenges such as the large remand population.

Senior management team members interviewed over the last four years have been unanimous that a formal centralised HMPPS-imposed model is unlikely to have the same level of success and that individual establishments should build on the core principles of the model to develop an approach that works for their institution.

There, is of course, another aspect to a successful partnership which can deliver prison community connections which is to find a suitable voluntary sector infrastructure organisation to host the community component, to facilitate access to a wide range of community organisations and to administer a community fund to encourage participation. These sorts of organisation, like the vast majority of charities, have also found it increasingly difficult to source funding since the "austerity years" started and it is important to ensure that their costs are met in any funding bid.

In order to support any prisons wishing to develop their own community connections initiative, the project workers, steering group, community providers and evaluator have developed a short guide of key learning points which is available to interested establishments.

This is an Executive Summary of the full evaluation conducted by Russell Webster in October 2026. If you would like a copy of the complete evaluation report, please email jenny.bowley@ocva.org.uk.

If you would like to make a financial contribution to the work of BCC, donations can be made via Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA). OCVA is a registered charity (Charity Number 1108504) with Bullingdon Community Connections as a restricted fund.

Direct payments can be made to: Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action. Sort code 60-83-01. Acc No 20155391. Reference: BCC. Please email jenny.bowley@ocva.org.uk to let her know that you have made a donation on behalf of Bullingdon Community Connections.

Address for payments: OCVA, The Old Courthouse, Floyds Row, Oxford OX1 1SS. (Please make cheques available to OCVA and mark back "BCC"

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