



GANGS IN PRISON

VIOLENCE REDUCTION
AND REHABILITATION 2024

catch
22

CONTENTS

- 03** INTRODUCTION
- 04** AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
- 05** IMPACT OF OUR APPROACH
- 06** OUR APPROACH
- 08** EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND COORDINATED INTELLIGENCE
- 09** REHABILITATION OFFERING ANOTHER DIRECTION (R.O.A.D.)
- 11** CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION
- 12** COMPLEX CASE MANAGEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT
- 14** TRAINING
- 15** CATCH22 INSIGHT
- 16** THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING
- 18** WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRACTITIONER?

INTRODUCTION

This brochure offers an insight into the Gangs and Violence Reduction Custodial services that Catch22 delivers in prisons across the UK.

Across its services, Catch22 works with 140,000 young people and adults each year, designing and delivering services that build resilience and aspiration in people and communities in England and Wales. Across 18 prisons, we work in custody screening and offender management, through to mediation and long-term resettlement. We deliver services for victims, foreign nationals in custody, and facilitate intervention and support to those on remand. 20,156 individuals were supported across all Catch22's custodial-based services in 2022-2023.

We work across the social welfare cycle. This means that our services are informed by a deep understanding of the issues that lead people to crime, gang involvement and ultimately, a prison sentence. Our teams draw on the expertise of our substance misuse projects, our alternative provision schools, and our child exploitation services, as well as the years of early intervention work, we have conducted within the justice system.

Knife crime has surged by 5% in the past year, according to the latest release from the ONS, marking a concerning rise in violence across England and Wales (benkinsella.org.uk). According to police records, there were 48,716 incidents involving a knife or sharp instrument, compared to 46,367 the previous year (The Ben Kinsella Trust, 2024).

The supposed security of gang association is persuasive, while imprisoned and gang-associated prisoners are disproportionately involved in violent incidents. Our research and experience have taught us that there are clear teachable moments to encourage gang exit, as well as improving prison environments that experience problematic groupings in custody, by responding to the negative consequences that arise from gang involvement in custody.

Effective risk management is essential to effective rehabilitation. Without it, prison teams are required to focus on being reactive, only tackling issues as and when they occur, rather than being able to build a strategy that prevents violence in the long term.

Rehabilitation and resettlement: Learning from experience, we understand that to truly reduce this violence, we must provide an alternative to gang life and empower each person to follow a new path. Our custody-based practitioners offer a unique opportunity to enable this, so that on release everyone has the best opportunity to successfully settle back into, and even thrive in, society.



AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS



Our award-winning and innovative gangs and violence reduction custodial services have been recognised as highly effective:

- BUTLER TRUST AWARD** received in 2015 for the services provided by the HMP Thameside Gang service. The Head of Custody referred to the "commitment, passion and belief" delivered by our team to create a safer environment at HMP Thameside. Violent incidents reduced from 86 to 26 per month, resulting in 60 fewer victims and "60 fewer families worried about the safety of their loved ones in custody".
- HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS**, Peter Clarke, said: "HMP Thameside's partnership with Catch22 to reduce gang violence was innovative and effective," following an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, published in 2017.
- BUTLER TRUST CERTIFICATE** awarded to the Gang service at HMYOI Feltham in 2018, acknowledged that: "There is documented evidence of positive behavioural changes in well over half of course participants, which has had a positive impact on reducing violence at Feltham."
- HMP LEEDS** service supported West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit to conduct research into gangs and violence within the establishment. The research concluded that: "The presence of Catch22 at HMP Leeds has been beneficial for both prisoners and staff". The report suggested that: "Consideration may be given to mainstreaming funding for Catch22 programmes, as well as to expansion of Catch22 offerings where possible."
- IMB REPORT** published in 2023, following a review at HMP Thameside, stated "The prison has an effective gangs' team which works closely with the police and community workers to help identify and separate the most prominent gang nominals."

IMPACT OF OUR APPROACH



In 2023, Catch22's Gangs and Custodial services saw:

1,480
early identifications

92%
of conflict resolutions result in a positive outcome

80% of participants demonstrate a marked level of improvement in their custodial behaviour following completion of the R.O.A.D. programme

80% of participants demonstrate a reduction in pro-criminal attitudes following completion of the R.O.A.D. programme

100% of participants, who engaged in Complex Case Management (CCM), demonstrate improvement in pro-social attitudes

63% increase in participants who felt confident in reporting concerns of gang involvement following completion of Catch22 training

56% increase in participants who reported to have a good understanding of gang culture and serious youth violence following completion of Catch22 training

OUR APPROACH



The Catch22 Gangs and Violence Reduction Custodial service supports prison management by reducing the risk posed by gang-involved prisoners, ultimately reducing the number of violent incidents.

Our approach focuses on offering alternatives to the supposed security and status offered by gangs. This is a strategy which research suggests is more effective than the suppression-only approach that is used in many prisons.

Our services are delivered by gang practitioners with expertise and knowledge of gangs, and their context both in the community and inside the prison. Gang practitioners identify the specific nature and impact of gang involvement within the establishment, and design targeted interventions informed by local context and experience. They work within the prison, developing intelligence with other prison teams, and support resettlement arrangements and opportunities with services in the community.

By working within, yet independent of, the prison regime, Catch22 has a unique and advantageous position. It means we are able to build trusted relationships with prisoners, without having to directly enforce punishment and security measures.

Our services have six distinct elements, each vitally important to maintaining safety within the prison and supporting people to change their behaviour.

1. EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND COORDINATED INTELLIGENCE

Gang practitioners work with new arrivals to the prison to identify risks and potential points of tension, before putting a plan in place to prevent gang-related incidents.

2. R.O.A.D PROGRAMME

The R.O.A.D. (Rehabilitation Offering Another Direction) programme is delivered as part of all our services. We use a trauma-informed and restorative approach to provide space for individuals to reflect on their experiences and to set pro-social goals for their lives.

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION

In the event of a violent incident that has occurred within or prior to custody, our service facilitates mediation sessions between all parties to resolve the issue and find a way forward.

4. COMPLEX CASE MANAGEMENT

One-to-one sessions allow practitioners to offer individualised and holistic support to prominent nominals such as those on a CSIP (acts of violence or self-isolating) or ACCT (thoughts or attempts of self-harm or suicide).

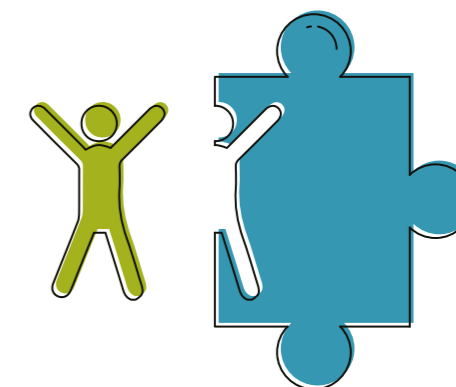
5. RESETTLEMENT

Working closely with resettlement teams and probation, we can ensure that gang-related issues are considered before release, and that prisoners have the support they need to sustain the progress achieved.

6. TRAINING

We develop and deliver training which is bespoke to each establishment's needs in order to increase staff knowledge and confidence in working with those who are gang-involved and those who are at risk of exploitation.

Catch22 can be commissioned to deliver all aspects of the service, but we also offer elements individually.

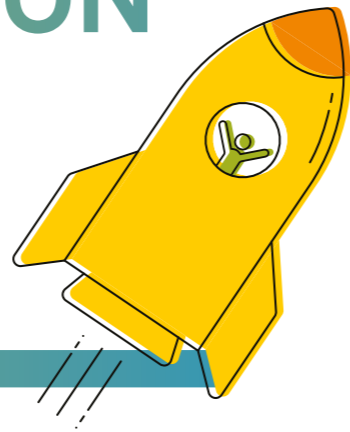


“The Catch22 facilitators were great in navigating meaningful conversations, challenging the men, creating opportunities for reflections, and encouraging the men to think in a pro-social way.”

West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (2023)



EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND COORDINATED INTELLIGENCE



Gang practitioners meet with new prisoners during the induction process - within 48 hours of their arrival at the prison.

Practitioners work to understand community tensions and rivalries to establish any potential conflicts. This allows them to gather sufficient information to recommend appropriate residential locations and necessary movement restrictions before the individual's departure from the induction unit.

Our teams also work with the prison establishment by collaborating with key departments and agencies who are involved in the care and management of prisoners, supporting to review conflicts and by conducting regular local research. Our teams work proactively with the Police, National Probation Service, Court, and other agencies to plan the safe management of any high-profile nominal that enters the prison.

REHABILITATION OFFERING ANOTHER DIRECTION (R.O.A.D.)

The Rehabilitation Offering Another Direction (R.O.A.D.) programme focuses on reducing pro-criminal attitudes, offering alternative ways to thinking, and promoting alternatives to violence.

The programme aims to develop consequential thinking skills, improve communication skills, and educate about stereotyping and the impact of perception.

The programme was designed and created by gang practitioners at HMP Thameside and is underpinned in theory. Our approach is supported by an extensive literature review, as well as the findings of research conducted by the Catch22 Dawes Unit in 2014.

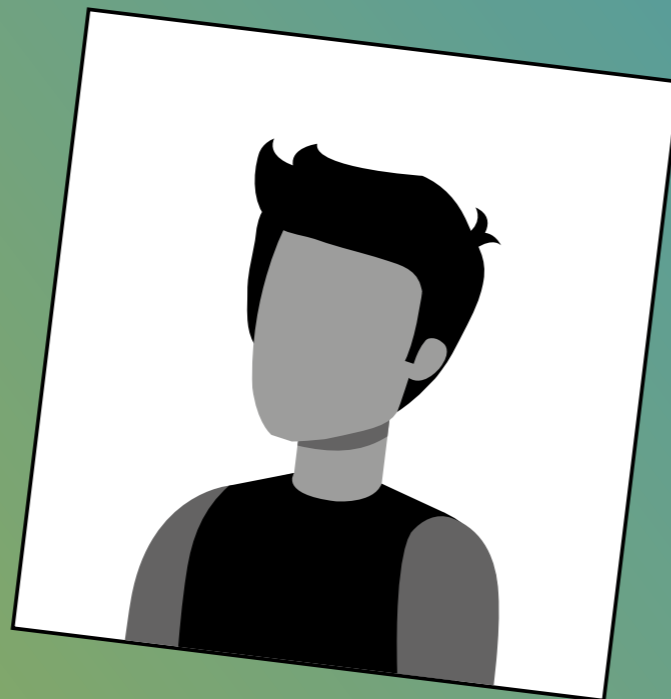
R.O.A.D. is typically facilitated over five days, with approximately 12 participants in each group. This can, however, be adapted to suit each establishment. The programme is interactive, relevant, and offers an alternative form of rehabilitation which has shown to be more effective with this cohort.





R.O.A.D CASE STUDY

Mr X* had a negative reputation in the prison. He was often involved in incidents and was known by many through his outside connections and gang affiliation. After finding out about the R.O.A.D. programme from a peer, he applied to attend the next course.



Mr X had a significant impact on the group throughout the programme. He felt confident in challenging negative attitudes and opinions that demonstrated impulsive thinking and immaturity, and conveyed his responses articulately by offering examples from his own life story.

Following the programme, Mr X expressed an interest in becoming a Violence Reduction Peer Mentor and felt inspired to seek opportunities in supporting young people in his community on his release.

Mr X was instrumental in raising awareness for the R.O.A.D. programme, supporting individuals with their homework and providing alternative pro-social viewpoints to support their progress.

*All case study names in this report have been changed

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION

WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS WITHIN THE PRISON TO REDUCE RISK

Gang practitioners seek to identify prisoners that would benefit from mediation. Intelligence gathered by gang practitioners enables them to target prisoners before conflicts escalate into violence. Requests to engage may also come from prisoners directly, or from staff across the prison following an incident.

Mediation helps resolve disputes or ongoing tensions - whether they have arisen within the prison or have followed prisoners in from the community. It involves bringing prisoners together to discuss the incident directly, with a view to bringing about lasting change and reducing the risk these prisoners pose to each other.

Not all cases will be suitable for mediation. In these instances, Catch22 practitioners will conduct shuttle conflict resolution discussions to determine a way forward for all parties.

Our teams use restorative practices to underpin conversations. This encourages accountability and responsibility in positive ways in a 'no blame, no shame' environment. By looking at the impact of behaviours, we can encourage positive actions and relationships, both individually and in groups.



COMPLEX CASE MANAGEMENT



Catch22's services offer targeted one-to-one sessions to prominent nominals such as those on a CSIP (acts of violence or self-isolating) or ACCT (thoughts or attempts of self-harm or suicide).

Gang practitioners build trusting, collaborative, and meaningful relationships with each prisoner. This allows practitioners to address and challenge the underlying issues causing anti-social behaviour and work towards improving an individual's future.

We tailor interventions to each prisoner's specific needs and monitor progress. Practitioners offer an array of interventions that use positive psychological discourse to encourage wellbeing, self-actualisation, and feelings of growth. This is key to rehabilitation for the targeted population. Utilising the principles of the 'Good Lives Model' (Ward and Gannon, 2006), we deliver material using motivational interviewing techniques, and our resources and delivery methods are solution-focused, strengths-based, and trauma-informed.

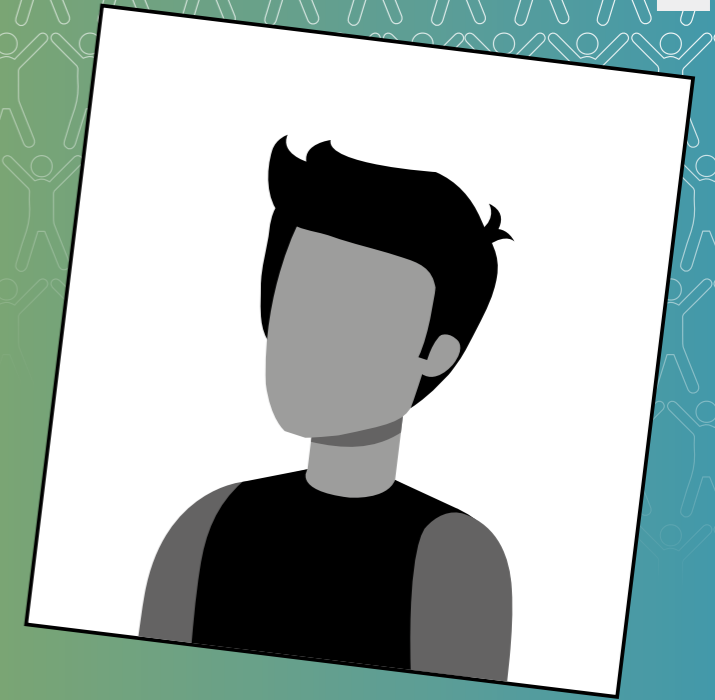
RESETTLEMENT

Catch22 collaborates with community-based and statutory organisations to support successful transitions from custody into the community.

Our focus is to promote prisoners leaving their gang-affiliated life and so our practitioners work to identify the support required to enable the individual to sustain the progress they have made. As part of this work, we will make recommendations to prison and probation staff during resettlement planning meetings, such as suggested exclusion zones.



COMPLEX CASE MANAGEMENT: CASE STUDY



Mr Y* was serving a sentence for gang and violence-related crimes. Upon arrival, he was distrustful of prison staff and refused to participate in the R.O.A.D. programme or any other educational courses that were available to him.

Over time, the Catch22 Gang Practitioner was able to build a positive relationship with Mr Y. This ensured that he felt supported whilst in custody, and encouraged him to engage more positively with staff and the potential opportunities. He also began to behave more positively towards his peers and other prison staff.

After a long conversation with his practitioner about the support available, Mr Y agreed to participate in the R.O.A.D. programme. Throughout his time on the programme, staff saw huge improvements in his behaviour and maturity, and found that he was even willing to open up to his peers to share his lived experience.

Mr Y speaks very positively about the programme and support he received from Catch22. The number of warnings he received from the prison reduced during this time, and he was granted his Category D Open Conditions upon completion of the programme.

*All case study names in this report have been changed

TRAINING

Catch22 works with senior management teams, violence reduction teams, and all individuals involved in maintaining a safe and secure period in custody. Where required, we deliver monthly training sessions to share our learnings and explore site-specific trends and community tensions.

We have developed CPD-certified training packages to upskill staff by increasing knowledge, understanding, and confidence in working effectively with this cohort.

GANG AWARENESS: KNOW THE SIGNS

This training session covers topics including:

- gang culture, serious youth violence and associated behaviours,
- the victim/offender overlap,
- child criminal exploitation (CCE) and County Lines,
- the stages of grooming and exploitation,
- how to successfully engage service users, and
- strategies to safeguard and manage associated risk.

[CLICK HERE OR SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION.](#)

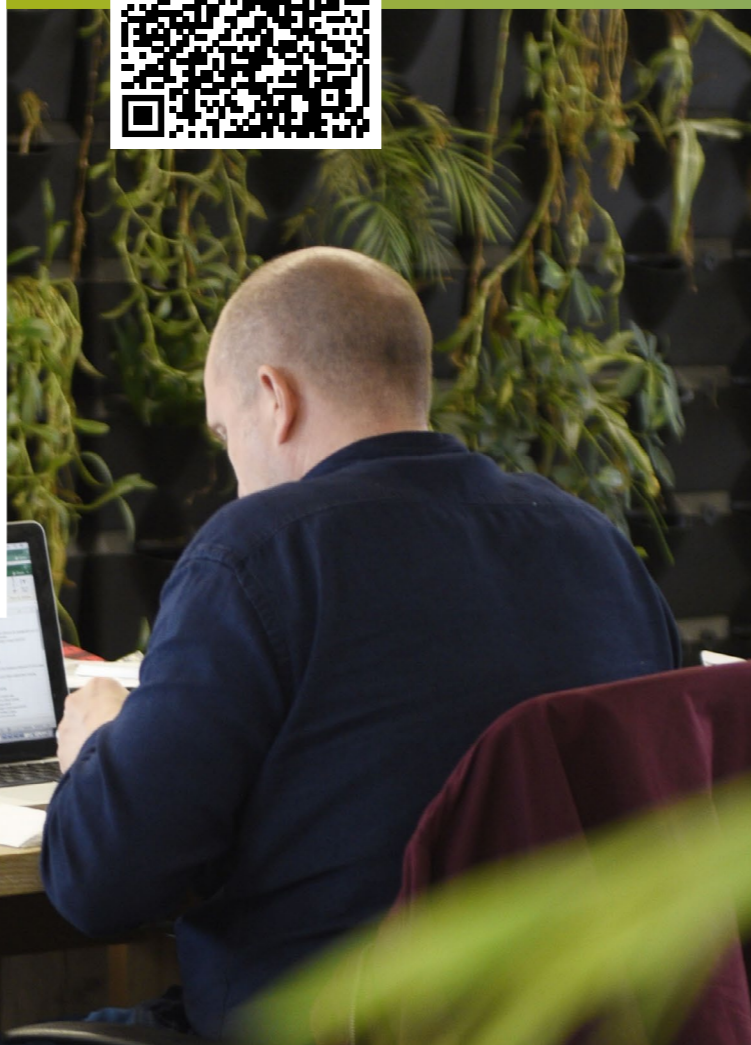


UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

This training session covers topics including:

- understanding violence, including why and how it occurs,
- how trauma impacts behaviour,
- exploitation, gang affiliation, and their links to violence,
- national aims,
- lone working and safeguarding procedures, and
- resources to facilitate conversations.

[CLICK HERE OR SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION.](#)



“The facts and figures were somewhat alarming, as was the reasoning. This is training that anyone working with young people needs to take part in and access.”

Training participant

CATCH22 INSIGHTS



Research-based evidence is essential for continuous development. It enables us to deliver high-quality services whilst remaining relevant and responsive to needs.

Our Gangs and Violence Reduction services work closely with our research team. Together, we bring together academic and frontline expertise to engage and connect Catch22 with emerging social issues and global research, enabling us to identify areas of best practice and respond to gaps in provision.

Catch22 are committed to sharing insights learned through research and experience to promote best practice and to help shape conversations with policymakers, support commissioning intentions, inform service design, and develop future interventions.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING WITH GANG -AFFILIATED PRISONERS



1. THE REGION THE PRISON SERVES IS UNIQUE:

Practitioners need to understand the establishment's population, issues within the community, and how the two relate.

2. GANG NOMINALS MAY NOT RECOGNISE THAT THEY ARE PART OF A GANG:

Particularly with young gang-affiliated prisoners, individuals may have been groomed by other/older gang members and not yet understand the nature of the group in which they are involved.

3. NOT ALL GANG NOMINALS ARE AWARE OF WHO THEIR RIVALS ARE:

Screening and induction meetings should be conducted as soon as possible to prevent the meeting of potential rivals. An individual may not have met the members of other gangs, but their identity may be known to rival gang members, which can place their safety at risk.

4. CONFLICTS ARE FOREVER CHANGING:

Rivals may now be allies in prison, and allegiances can change overnight.

5. KEEPING AN EYE ON WHO PRISONERS ARE TALKING TO:

Practitioners should observe where prisoners ask to be located and how they interact with each other. This can suggest the hierarchy within gangs and where potential risks are.

6. COMMON INTERESTS AND PERSONALITIES:

Not all young people are gang-affiliated and not all violent incidents are motivated by gang rivalries. When entering custody, young people can often find comfort in grouping together with other young people who have common interests or shared perspectives and personalities. This is detailed further in the 2014 'Gangs in Prison' research conducted by the Dawes Unit at HMP Thameside.

7. EACH PERSON HAS OTHER ISSUES BEYOND THEIR GANG-AFFILIATION:

Aside from their association with gangs, individuals may need additional help dealing with grief, trauma, or the violence they have likely witnessed.

8. BUILDING TRUST IS HOW WE LEARN:

Only through trusting relationships can we draw out information and join the dots. It is imperative to set boundaries on what is shared and be conscious of how we disclose it when necessary.

9. KNOW ABOUT ANY ALIASES OR NICKNAMES A PERSON MIGHT HAVE:

This information will make it easier to follow conversations between prisoners and the conversations prisoners have with you.

10. ONLINE CONFLICTS CAN SPILL OVER INTO REAL LIFE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BE A CATALYST FOR SERIOUS VIOLENCE:

Although those within the prison should not have access, new arrivals or those talking to friends outside the prison may become aware of information regarding individuals or rival groups.

11. AVOID ASSUMPTIONS:

Although there are many trends and patterns that we see across our work with gang nominals, it is vital that we approach all of our work remembering that every case, and every person, is unique.

12. BASE ALL WORK IN RESEARCH:

The 'Gangs in Prison' research paper published by the Dawes Unit (supported by the HMP Thameside team), gives an in-depth insight into the complexities of gangs and conflict, and the benefits of 'teachable moments' in the prison setting.



[CLICK HERE OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS THE GANGS IN PRISON RESEARCH PAPER](#)

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRACTITIONER?

RELATABLE: Existing gang practitioners believe this is the number one quality required to be successful in their role. It is essential to interact and build trust with prisoners to support them.

KNOWLEDGABLE: It is imperative to be well-informed and curious about gang culture and specific communities. Understanding the landscape is vital to working with these groups.

PATIENT: Working with gang nominals is not a linear process and, sometimes, progress is slow. Gang practitioners give it their all, even when the impact does not appear immediately obvious.

RESILIENT: Working in a frontline prison service has its challenges. Gang practitioners can see the bigger picture and bounce back from any setbacks experienced by the people they support.

HONEST: We manage expectations and avoid making promises we cannot keep. Our role within the prison is specific and limited, and we must be able to tell prisoners what is and is not possible within our remit.

EXPERIENCED: Most of the people gang practitioners work with have been through struggles and hardship in their lives. We should understand this and the impact such life experiences can have.

PASSIONATE: Being a gang practitioner is a tough job, but the belief that we can make a difference is what keeps us going on the toughest days at work.

BALANCED: We are as comfortable talking to a Prison Governor as we are talking to a prisoner, and we can build trusted relationships with each. Working for Catch22 offers a degree of independence, but there is also a duty to share information and keep staff and prisoners safe.

“

“One of the participants commented that he learned more in the two days so far in R.O.A.D. than he had with any other course he had completed whilst being in prison. This is a real testament to how valuable the R.O.A.D. programme was for the men and the passion of the Catch22 team was evidenced throughout!”

West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership (2023)



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