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An Action Research  
Project on Mental Health  
and Criminal Justice

# Jo's Action Plan



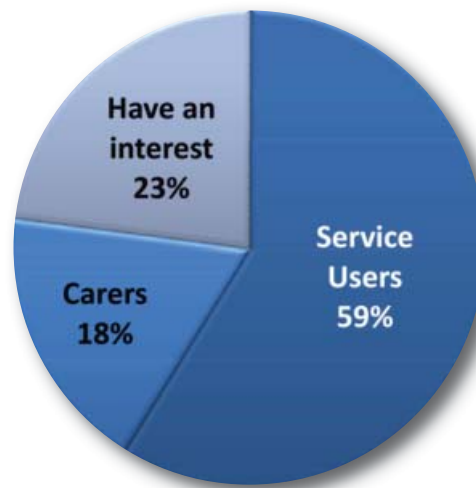
*Jo Roberts is the service user Champion for the Reducing Risk – Achieving Recovery Action Research Project. Jo, who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, has valuable personal experience of mental health services and the criminal justice system having been remanded in prison, spent time in the Caswell Clinic and Ashworth Hospital, and been under a Home Office Section 37/41 for many years.*

**Hello everybody!**

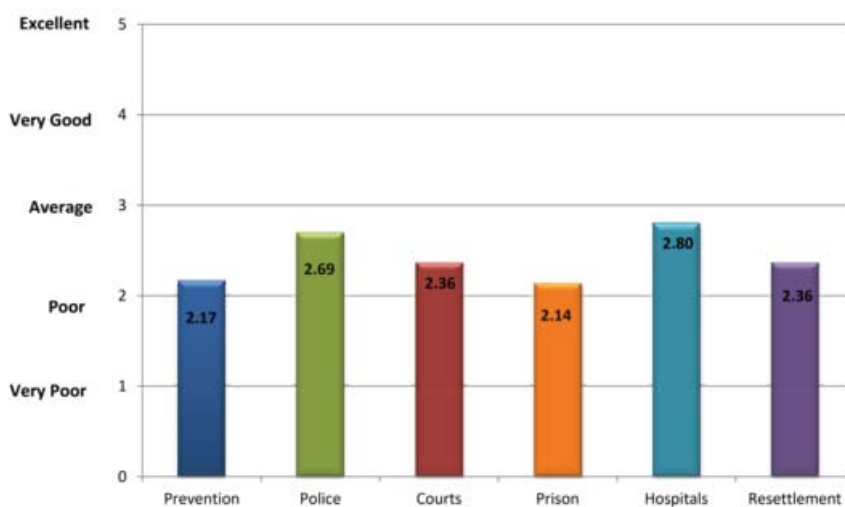
**This is my report and Action Plan following our 2017 Reducing Risk – Achieving Recovery Action Research Project.** We have talked to over 300 service users, carers and interested professionals and held an all-Wales Seminar to find out how we can improve the lives of people with a serious mental illness who get in trouble with the law - or just encounter criminal justice agencies when they become unwell. I want to share what we found out and to set out some key actions.



**Participants in our survey:** there were about equal numbers of men and women and 5% were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds



Our survey showed that users, carers, and professionals did not believe mental health and criminal justice agencies were supporting users effectively at any stage in the pathway.



How well are mental health and criminal justice agencies doing at each stage?

## Here are some of the problems we heard about...

On **prevention** people thought services were not supportive enough.

*"I was diagnosed while in care and had no intervention apart from medication. I had no counselling and no help."*

The main issue for the **police** concerned training.

*"I think the police do as well as they can but they haven't been given the correct training or resources."*

Lack of communication and information was a problem in **courts**.

*"I was treated okay in court but nobody asked whether I had a mental illness. If they had asked I would have told them."*

**Prisons** were not geared up to help people with a serious illness.

*"I've been to prison many times and I have had no treatment for mental health. I can get the drugs to 'zonk' me out but not any counselling or treatment."*

**Hospitals** did not always provide a safe and therapeutic environment.

*"There is too much violence in hospitals and staff use meds as coercion to make patients more submissive."*

Too many people received little support with **resettlement**.

*"We need better provision for people who need resettlement: this includes housing and ongoing support for a minimum of six months"*



# The big issues...



I know from my own experience that there are no quick fixes to the problems faced by people with a serious mental illness in the criminal justice system. They are among the most vulnerable people in our society and it is a matter of shame that they not only receive insufficient support but are also placed in unsuitable and unsafe environments for which the state is itself responsible.

It would be betrayal of those who took part in the project not to set out some of the fundamental reforms which are needed...



**A specialised pathway** is required for people with a serious mental illness who enter the criminal justice system. This pathway needs (1) to protect them from the damaging environments of detention, courts, and imprisonment and (2) wherever possible to divert them systematically to the most appropriate service at each opportunity along the pathway.



**Nobody with a serious mental illness should be in a police cell or prison:** sufficient hospital and other specialised provision should be available – with appropriate levels of security – in all circumstances, whether or not any offence was directly connected to a mental illness. While prison is still used the needs of women and young people need to be addressed, ensuring appropriate provision is available close to home - in Wales.



**Recovery and resettlement** should be foremost at all stages of the pathway, providing hope for users and families and a main focus for agencies and professionals. Care and Treatment Plans required under the Mental Health Measure provide a practical model for this focus.



**Inequalities must be addressed** in particular the continuing disproportionate representation of people from black and minority ethnic communities in the criminal justice system.



**Carers and families must be supported:** often providing the only consistent support for service users along the pathway, carers and families need information, training and support together with easy access to service users and to the professionals who are supporting them.

## These key issues will remain the focus of our work for long-term improvement.

On the next page we look at the immediate actions which could make a big difference...



# Immediate actions...



Wales' **Crisis Care Concordat** offers a practical means of improving prevention, promoting diversion, and providing a focus on recovery. Our concern is about *implementation* of the Concordat. *We will press the Welsh Government to make the Concordat an overall priority (that is not just in mental health) for Health Boards and Local Authorities, requiring them to report progress to the Minister of Health and Social Services; we will also urge criminal justice agencies to make the Concordat a priority; and we will press all agencies to make the Concordat work in practice by adopting and implementing efficient and unbureaucratic referral systems.*



Users' and carers' willingness to support professionals could be given a practical focus by the development of **user-led training** for professionals, especially those in criminal justice agencies. This could not only improve knowledge but also promote understanding and respect between users and professionals. *We will aim to develop a user-led, specialist training scheme in Wales.*



**Housing** plays a crucial role both in prevention and in the resettlement and recovery of users. *We will press Welsh Government and local authorities to raise the priority of users with a serious mental illness, and specifically those in the criminal justice system, in addressing homelessness and accessing suitable housing.*



Users and carers have noted the development of specialist **mental health courts**. We believe these courts can improve the court environment for users and carers, promote diversion, enable informed sentencing, and so produce better outcomes for users. *We will press for accelerated development of mental health courts in Wales.*



*Left: delegates discuss key actions at the Reducing Risk - Achieving Recovery Seminar which I hosted in November.*



High quality **Appropriate Adult** services need to be deployed consistently across Wales: *we will urge expansion of these services to ensure all people with a serious mental illness are supported.*



**Active interventions to promote resettlement and recovery** should be available to courts throughout Wales: *we will urge expansion of Out of the Blue and similar services.*



Opportunities for improvement in the use of **Places of Safety** (when the Policing and Crime Act 2017 is implemented) should be seized: *we will monitor implementation of the new rules and work with service users and professionals to identify how practice can be improved.*



As part of the Action Research Project we anticipated the need for improved information for users and carers. To this end we have already developed an interactive **Criminal Justice Survival Guide** – visit [survivalguide.hafal.org](http://survivalguide.hafal.org). *We will promote the Guide widely and also develop a portal for professionals so that they can use it in support of their clients.*



These are some immediate steps we can take but many other ideas were provided through our survey and the Seminar; *we will undertake further analysis of the Project's findings and make use of this in our continuing campaign for improvement.*

Thank you for taking an interest in our Plan! If you want more information or to get help and support please go to [hafal.org/reducing-risk-achieving-recovery](http://hafal.org/reducing-risk-achieving-recovery) or get in touch with us using the information overleaf...


*Jo*



[hafal.org/reducing-risk-achieving-recovery](http://hafal.org/reducing-risk-achieving-recovery)

# Contact details

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Comic Relief funds Hafal's Access to Justice service which provides a single point of contact for criminal justice agencies, vulnerable individuals and their families. For more information email [hafal@hafal.org](mailto:hafal@hafal.org) or call 01792 816600.



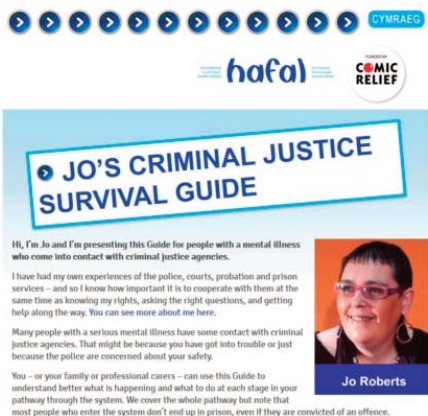


Out of the Blue is Hafal's Big Lottery funded service which provides a mental health intervention for offenders receiving community sentences at court in the South Wales Police authority area. For more information email [hafal@hafal.org](mailto:hafal@hafal.org) or call 01792 816600.





Hafal provides an appropriate adult service in the South Wales Police, Dyfed Powys Police and Gwent Police areas. Appropriate adults support, advise and assist vulnerable people when they are in custody. For more information email [appropriateadult@hafal.org](mailto:appropriateadult@hafal.org) or call 01792 816600.



## Jo's Criminal Justice Survival Guide

Jo Roberts' Survival Guide is an online resource for people with a mental illness who find themselves in trouble with the law or have contact with criminal justice agencies. It includes plenty of tips and advice on what to do at each stage in your pathway through the system. Visit the website at: [survivalguide.hafal.org](http://survivalguide.hafal.org)

