

# ON TRACK



Self-tracking tools can be a valuable way of improving mental health in prison settings, say **Gearóid Carey** and **Lisa Ogilvie**

**I**n prison settings, addiction, substance misuse, mental health issues, self-harm and violence are unfortunately all too common. Self-tracking tools provide a way for people with issues such as these to gain insight into aspects of their life that are important to their wellbeing, personal development, and behaviour modification. Simple self-tracking tools are something prison residents can be given to help them better navigate their custodial journey so they may effect positive change. This article provides an overview of how these tools can be implemented

and their positive impact.

The drug and alcohol recovery service (DARS) team at HMP Manchester in collaboration with the safer custody department and Jennifer Clark, who specialises in neurodiversity within prisons, created two self-tracking tools for residents. The first of the trackers considers a weekly cycle of reflection. It has three scaled questions, scored from 0 to 10, along with a chart to plot the total score. Each question relates to a reliable indicator, or psychometric measure, of how a person is doing in recovery (*see boxes*).

These trackers have been

used by residents at HMP Manchester for a number of years, and during this time it has been observed that engagement with them is most effective when conducted in a structured and social way, such as through peer mentoring, sharing circles and monthly community surveys.

## PEER MENTORING

At present, over 30 residents at HMP Manchester are engaged in self-tracking peer mentoring. This activity involves meeting with a peer mentor, referred to as a recovery peer, either weekly or monthly. During these sessions, mentees track and discuss their recovery using one of the self-tracking tools.

With these structured sessions serving as the foundation of their connection, mentors and mentees engage in a variety of other supportive activities. For instance, they might play chess, attend the gym together, or discuss recovery-related workbooks on topics such as managing cravings. Recovery peers are also available for a

chat and a cup of tea if mentees feel they are at risk of breaking abstinence, and will do daily check-ins with mentees who are going through a difficult time.

When mentees are doing well and feel they no longer need weekly mentoring sessions, they are encouraged to switch to monthly self-tracking check-ins. This maintains their connection with structured peer support, helping them to sustain their momentum and stay on track for the long term.

## SHARING CIRCLES

A sharing circle is a weekly group, usually with around eight participants. At the start of each session, participants complete the weekly self-tracking questions and plot their total scores. They can then share their charts and talk about their week. They are also encouraged to talk about their plans moving forward and identify some action steps for the coming week.

Following each participant's share, the rest of the group is encouraged to provide feedback

### TRACKER 1 – WEEKLY REFLECTION

**Q1:** How was your personal sense of wellbeing over the last week?

**Q2:** How were things in social settings over the last week?

**Q3:** How well have you done at connecting with positive and supportive people over the past week?

### TRACKER 2 – MONTHLY REFLECTION

**Q1:** How stressful was the last month?

**Q2:** How supported have you felt over the last month?

'It helps me to see how I'm progressing and helps to open up conversations about things that are going on.'

## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE SHARING CIRCLES

**Time** for each participant to reflect on their week and chart.

The **opportunity** for each participant to share their feelings and experiences in a supportive environment.

**Encouragement** for participants to think about steps they can take to progress on their recovery.

**Feedback** from the group, offering new ideas and insights.

Hearing other people's **stories** and seeing how their journey unfolds, providing valuable learning opportunities.

The opportunity to **support** peers, which can be fulfilling and is often an essential part of recovery.

in the form of encouragement, support, and guidance. Even though the group structure is simple and straightforward, the benefits it affords have been shown to have a desirable therapeutic effect on residents, as is demonstrated by the progress recorded in the trackers and the feedback received.

*'These tools are very helpful. I think it's good to address your problems and how you're feeling so you can improve on what it is that's bothering you. I was sceptical at first but am glad now that I gave it a chance.'*

*'It helps me to see how I'm progressing and helps to open up conversations about things that are going on. It helps to talk about my chart with somebody I know, helps me to relax and be open and honest.'*

*'I think they are very good as they give me the opportunity to monitor myself and how I am feeling. Therefore, I can look at ways to improve my sense of well-being whilst acknowledging what may be going right or wrong for me. I would recommend these to anyone who is up and down with their moods and mental health, as it gives them the chance to see how things can be done different, for the better.'*

## MONTHLY SURVEYS

Each participant in the community survey completes the monthly self-tracking tool, which is then reviewed by a recovery practitioner or care coordinator. It is then possible to identify residents with a low score so extra support may be offered.

*'I think they're a good idea as you can look and compare every week and see where you're OK. You can see if things have improved or declined, and where the scores are not good you know that those are the areas you need to work on improving.'*



## Weekly Wellbeing Check-in

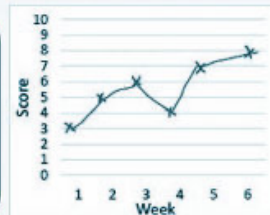
Think back over the last week and chart the numbers that best describe how you have been doing.

**How have things gone with your personal sense of wellbeing?**

Think about your sense of meaning, purpose and belonging and how you have been doing in your emotions and feelings.

0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Not well Very well

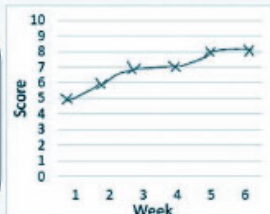


**How have things gone in social settings?**

For example, at appointments, at social events, in groups you attend, whilst volunteering and at work.

0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

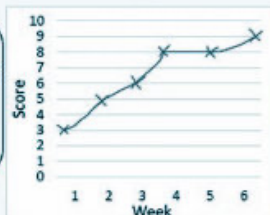
Not well Very well



**How well have you done at making and keeping positive and supportive relationships?**

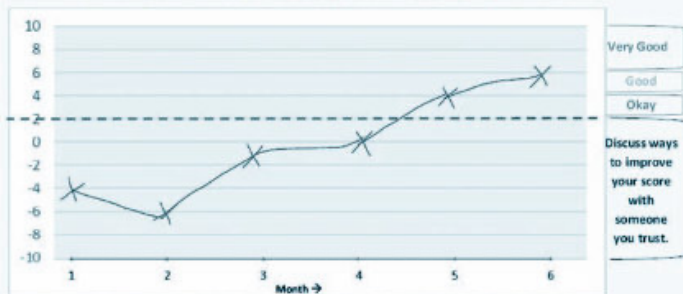
0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Not well Very well



## Monthly Wellbeing Chart

Take your stressed score away from your support score for this month and put it on the table below.



## PIECING IT TOGETHER

Over the past four months, the DARS team has been preparing to launch a new recovery wing in HMP Manchester – an exciting time for both residents and staff. The care coordinator responsible for its development, Stephanie Ash, has encouraged the integration of structured approaches, which includes self-tracking from the outset.

The recovery wing is now up and running, and every high-intensity client attends a weekly self-tracking sharing circle for their first two months. In addition, all recovery wing residents have opportunities for weekly self-tracking peer-mentoring sessions and are

invited to participate in the monthly community survey. This survey allows staff to monitor the average score of residents on the wing and respond with additional attention and support to any residents with a low score.

Moving forward, focus remains on refining these tools and strategies, which are guided by the invaluable insights of the residents and the unwavering dedication of the staff at the prison.

*If you'd like to know more about self-tracking for recovery, Gearóid's book – Recovery Made Simple – Why Suffer? is available on Amazon.*

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