

Institution: Liverpool John Moores University

Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature

Title of case study: Free to Write

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Our work has impacted positively on the lives of prisoners, influenced prison-education practice, and contributed to public- and third-sector debates around the penal system. We achieved this by the production, dissemination and evaluation of *Free to Write*, an anthology combining cultural-historical analysis with prisoners' writing; through research on the experiences of prisoners in the past; and in the publication of a well-received series of crime novels challenging assumptions about criminality. Through practice-based and academic research, knowledge exchange with practitioners in public- and third-sectors, and creative outputs directed to specialist and non-specialist audiences, staff explored the role of creative writing in prisoner rehabilitation, addressing recidivism and in raising public awareness of the complex nature of offending.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Can creative writing help prisoners to imagine, and go on to lead, a better life after prison? Gareth Creer (Subject Leader Creative Writing) and Aileen La Tourette (Senior Lecturer until 2011) built on extensive experience as prison writers-in-residence (Creer, HMYOI Glen Parva, 1998-2002; La Tourette, HMP Belmarsh 1995-1997) to test the proposition that creative writing could foster rehabilitation. Cultural historians Helen Rogers and Tamsin Spargo provided historical evidence of the relationship between prison education and rehabilitation to help contextualise and evaluate current experiential-based research. Outputs include:

- a) production of the anthology *Free to Write: Prison Voices Past and Present*;
- b) Creer's fiction (as Adam Creed);
- c) research publications and conferences involving academics and practitioners.

The earliest phase of the Free to Write project (2004-09) drew on practical work with Prison and Probation Services. Awarded £55,000 funding by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, researchers developed, delivered and assessed writing projects, producing workbooks and publishing inmates' writing. Enthusiasm among ex-offenders (demonstrated in qualitative feedback from partners and inmates) about working collectively and creatively in written reflections encouraged the team to extend the project. From 2009 they established a network of practitioners to evaluate participation in and delivery of workshops. The resulting anthology is a resource to be used by educators and by prisoners before release, combining accessible research articles on prisoners past and present with original, annotated, creative work by prisoners. Led by Creer and Spargo, and supported by Hannah Priest (Postdoctoral Researcher, Grade 5, 2012), the team established on-going dialogue with professionals at various institutions (including HMPs Frankland, Lancaster Farms, Styal, Shrewsbury, Greenock), drawing on connections built up through the Paul Hamlyn project, and newer contacts with organisations including the Koestler Trust, Prisoners Education Trust, and the Writers in Education Trust. This network ensured that the volume was informed by leading practice in the sector.

Drawing on his own engagement with the initial project Creer produced five crime novels, published by Faber (2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013). *Suffer the Children* (2009; translated into 8 languages; world sales 70,000+, library loans 60,000+, script commissioned by BBC and accepted by ITV Studios) explores the nature of the penal and judicial systems. In 'D.I. Staffe' Creer

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established a character whose liminal status questions conventional notions of guilt. Throughout the series Creer has turned his attention to scenarios in which the nature of offending can be explored: <http://www.faber.co.uk/catalog/author/adam-creed>.

Rogers has published in professional and academic journals (*Prison Service Journal*, *Victorian Studies*, *Past and Present*). Spargo was awarded an AHRB fellowship (2002) to complete archival research in the Library of Congress and the New York Correctional Services on American prison writer Oliver Perry. In disseminating research, staff targeted conferences involving prison-service practitioners: Rogers/La Tourette: 'Reading and Writing in Prison' (Napier University, 2010); Spargo/Priest: 'Prison and the Public' (Edge Hill University, March 2013). Rogers and Alker engaged in multi-disciplinary dialogue, presenting at LJMU's Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion Seminar Series and participating in the AHRC-funded research network event 'Our Criminal Past' (2013). They continue to contribute to online debate: <http://www.ourcriminalpast.co.uk/uncategorized/digitisation-social-media-and-crime-history-by-zoe-alker/>.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All outputs not listed in REF2 can be supplied on request.

Creer, Gareth, Hannah Priest and Tamsin Spargo (eds.), *Free to Write: Prison Voices Past and Present* (Wirral: Headland, 2013).

Creer, Gareth (as Adam Creed), *Suffer The Children* (London: Faber, 2009). ISBN: 9780571243655.

Other novels include:

Willing Flesh (London: Faber, 2010). ISBN: 9780571245260

Pain of Death (London: Faber, 2011). ISBN: 9780571245253

Death In the Sun (London: Faber, 2012). ISBN: 9780571274994

Kill and Tell (London: Faber, 2013). ISBN: 9780571275007

Rogers, Helen, 'The Way to Jerusalem: Reading, Writing and Reform in an Early Victorian Gaol', *Past and Present* 205 (2009): 71-104. DOI [10.1093/pastj/gtp039](https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtp039) (listed in REF2)

Rogers, Helen, 'Singing at Yarmouth Gaol: Christian Instruction and Inmate Culture in the Nineteenth Century', *Prison Service Journal* 199 (2012): 35-43 (listed in REF2)

Rogers, Helen, "'Oh what beautiful books!': Captivated Reading in an Early Victorian Prison', *Victorian Studies* 55.1 (2012): 57-84. DOI [10.1353/vic.2012.0140](https://doi.org/10.1353/vic.2012.0140) (listed in REF2)

Spargo, Tamsin, *Wanted Man: The Forgotten Story of an American Outlaw* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004). ISBN: 1582342288

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

By drawing on the experiences, outputs and evaluations of the first-phase Free to Write project and engaging with academic and practitioner debates on prison-writing, staff created two forms of impact. In *Free to Write: Prison Voices Past and Present*, they built on a network of professionals (writers, educationalists, prison-service staff, and organisations in the prison system) to create a volume of practical use to its two-fold readership of prisoners and prison-educators/writers/professionals. Creer's experiences as a prison educator and coordinator of a

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network of probationers, practitioners, public services and police were translated into well-received novels interrogating notions of justice and provoking public debate.

In its initial phase (up to 2009) the project produced a Creative Writing Workbook in Life Writing (validated by Open College Network) and increased public awareness through magazines and creative projects. Over 2000 copies of eight publications were distributed to Merseyside hostels, needle exchanges, Liverpool City libraries, and doctors' surgeries. Presentations were given at Liverpool's Writing on the Wall Festival. Partners included Merseyside Bail Hostels: Southwood, Canning House, Adelaide House and Arch Initiatives. The initial project was scrutinised by Vivian Griffiths and Gillian Squirrel, evaluators for Paul Hamlyn's nationwide, multi-million pound Free with Words agenda. Working with key public-sector partners including Merseyside Probation Services, HMP Liverpool and Liverpool City Libraries, and engaging directly with inmates and ex-offenders, FTW established a platform for the publication, dissemination and evaluation of a prison writing anthology.

Copies of the anthology were distributed to over 100 UK prisons, probation hostels and agencies in England, Scotland and Wales, as a resource for prisoners and practitioners. Sent directly to institutional library contacts, they can be used by individual prisoners and as group activity teaching aids. The anthology was distributed with workbooks refined since phase one of the research. Beneficiaries include: Michael Crowley, writer-in-residence at HMP Lancaster Farms Young Offenders Institution and author of *Behind the Lines: Creative Writing with Offenders and People at Risk* (Waterside Press, 2012); Harry Palmer, writer-in-residence at HMP Frankland and organiser of a creative writing project at the Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder Westgate Unit; Kim Haygarth, librarian at HMP Forest Bank. An evaluation workshop was held at Bleakhouse Library, Oldbury (May 2013). Practitioners and professionals in the field committed to disseminating the project include: the Writers in Prisons Network, the Prisoners Education Trust (via their e-newsletter Learning Matters), the Prison Reading Groups (Roehampton University), and the Koestler Trust. Noting the value of the anthology, Rod Clark, Chief Executive of Prisoners Education Trust, commented: 'Taken collectively, the power and strength of the individual voices combine to testify to the book's central message about the importance of letting those voices emerge.' The book was sent to 25 British universities where criminology and creative writing departments cover prison writing/issues.

Creer's novels and public appearances stimulate analysis of the complicated dynamics of reform and recidivism. He references his experience in residencies and as project leader of FTW in the themes of his fiction: the role of the CPOS in *Suffer The Children*; prison conditions in *Willing Flesh* and *Kill and Tell*. Creer has appeared at crime fiction's most important worldwide conference, the Harrogate Crime Festival (2011: 30,000 attendance) on a panel with senior police officer and prison reformer Jackie Malton (the real-life DCI Jane Tennison in *Prime Suspect*), alongside Erwin James, Duncan Campbell and Jonathan Aitken. In addition to regular appearances at Harrogate, Creer has spoken at Crimefest, Bristol (2013), and literary and crime writing festivals, promoted by Faber and Faber. Europe's foremost literary crime critic, Barry Forshaw (*The Independent*, 1/6/2009) notes: '*Suffer The Children* is as good a snapshot of the state of the modern British crime novel as you are likely to encounter. A million miles away from the comforting milieu of more sedate British crime novels, Creed's writing gods are self-evidently the tough Americans ... and his bleak view of British society is minatory and unsettling. Pungent, edgy and visceral, London's answer to *The Wire*.' *Suffer the Children*, *Willing Flesh* (2010) and *Kill and Tell* (2013) address the plights of inmates. The result of this is a 'distinctive presence in crime fiction, his unusual subject matter rendered in lyrical prose and studded with incisive character portraits' (Unsworth, *Guardian* 16/4/2011).

From these activities we have developed a platform for future impact. We continue to collate evaluations of the *Free to Write* anthology. Underpinning research on the anthology and the writing projects reaches a wide audience through our use of social media, including <http://adamcreed.co.uk/#Prison>; @Victorian Crime Twitter account (Alker). We now have a highly productive relationship with St George's Hall Liverpool, participating in their National Museums Merseyside Heritage Lottery Funding bid for a Justice Museum, working with them (through Alker) on the provision of learning resources, and discussing future possibilities for knowledge exchange.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Prisoner Testimonials from phase one of the project can confirm their contributions to the research but also the positive outcomes they experienced through working collectively and creatively in producing their written reflections.
2. Prisoners Education Trust: <http://pet.netefficiency.co.uk/index.php?id=741> can confirm the value and importance of the anthology produced by the research team at LJMU and his testimonial: 'Taken collectively, the power and strength of the individual voices combine to testify to the book's central message about the importance of letting those voices emerge.'
3. Writer-in-residence and prisoners from HMP Lancaster Farms Young Offenders Institution can corroborate the use and value of the project's anthology and workbooks within the YOI.
4. Erwin James, writer, ex-offender and Guardian columnist can confirm the value of the anthology and the significance and benefits of the overall project.
5. Curator of Collections: St George's Hall, Liverpool can corroborate the contribution of LJMU to learning resources and on-going participation in funding bid.
6. Faber and Faber: <http://www.faber.co.uk/catalog/author/adam-creed>