

# Citizen Advisory Committee

Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections  
Correctional Service Canada



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## Digital Literacy: Empowering Transition from Incarceration to Community Webinar: November 28, 2023

Video: <https://youtu.be/8-TU2JGpB2I>

Digital literacy is vital for individuals transitioning from prison to the community. It equips them with the essential skills to succeed in today's technologically dependent society, enabling effective communication and access to services, education, and employment. Digital skills enable personal growth, foster a sense of inclusion, and reduce the risk for reoffending.

In this, our fourth annual webinar, we heard five speakers discuss various aspects of digital literacy in the correctional system:

- the range of digital skills needed for successful social reintegration
- advanced skills such as software coding and artificial intelligence
- digital literacy for specific populations (e.g., women and older prisoners)
- staff and public attitudes about offenders' access to technology
- overcoming psychological barriers to digital literacy
- innovative and secure delivery of digital skills training
- measuring the impact of digital skills training on post-release outcomes
- employer partnerships
- ethical considerations

Our distinguished speakers:

**[Dr. Bianca Reisdorf](#)** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research focuses on marginalized populations affected by digital inequalities, including incarcerated individuals and those returning to the community. She uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of digital skills programs on post-release outcomes. [bianca.reisdorf@charlotte.edu](mailto:bianca.reisdorf@charlotte.edu) | Presentation: [15:27](#)

**Pia Puolakka** has been with the [Finnish Prison and Probation Service](#) since 2012. From 2018-2022, she was a manager of the [Smart Prison Project](#), which introduced in-cell digital devices to an open prison for women. She continues this work as a Senior Specialist and Team Head, expanding the project to Finland's closed prisons. She also leads *RISE AI*, developing artificial intelligence applications for use in corrections. A forensic psychologist by training, Ms. Puolakka is part of the [EuroPris ICT Expert Group](#) and the [Council for Penological Co-operation](#). [pia.puolakka@om.fi](mailto:pia.puolakka@om.fi) | Presentation: [38:15](#)

**James Woodland** is Chief of Education at [Bath Institution](#) in Ontario, a medium security prison run by Correctional Service Canada. He heads the [Digital Education Project](#), which supports access to digital learning opportunities and digital skill development. The project started at Bath Institution three years ago and is now at every minimum and medium security institution in Ontario, plus several sites in the Atlantic, Prairie, and Pacific Regions. Mr. Woodland also oversees upskilling, micro-credentials, and certification programs in partnership with [CORCAN](#), educational institutions, and non-profits. [James.Woodland@CSC-SCC.GC.CA](mailto:James.Woodland@CSC-SCC.GC.CA)  
Presentation: [1:01:06](#)

**Molly Kelly** is a Partnerships Manager at [The Last Mile](#). After launching in San Quentin State Prison in 2010, The Last Mile now partners with correctional institutions and employers across the US to train software engineers, developers, and other workforce-ready professionals. A graduate of The Last Mile program at Indiana Women's Prison, Molly's journey has propelled her to foster collaborations that drive positive change. With her unique blend of skills and empathy, she creates opportunities for justice-impacted individuals seeking transformation and empowerment. [molly.kelly@thelastmile.org](mailto:molly.kelly@thelastmile.org) | Presentation: [1:22:12](#)

**Aron Roy** is an IT apprentice at [Checkr](#), a human resources technology company. A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Aron is a testament to resilience and growth. His decade behind bars became a catalyst for discovery, where he learned to master coding through The Last Mile program at San Quentin. Aron was a staff writer for the [San Quentin News](#) and a peer mentor for the California Department of Corrections. In addition to his IT work, Aron is a tireless advocate for justice reform. Presented with Molly Kelly: [1:22:12](#)

This webinar was hosted by the [Citizen Advisory Committee for Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections](#), a division of [Correctional Service Canada \(CSC\)](#). We are community members who observe CSC operations; liaise between the public and CSC; and advise CSC on its policies. This was our third [annual webinar](#), moderated by CAC Vice-Chair [Eddy Elmer](#) and CAC member [Swayam Chandra](#). A special thanks to CAC member and past-Chair, John Houck, for video editing. For more information about the CAC, please email [Eddy Elmer](#) or [Dennis Herfst](#), Area Director, Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections.

Speakers' slides and resources are available on the next pages.

## Our Previous [Webinars](#)

**2020:** [Meeting the Needs of Aging Offenders in the Community](#)

**2021:** [Victims of Canadian Federal Offenders: Meeting Needs and Improving Supports](#)

**2022:** [Public Safety Through Support and Accountability: Community Reintegration Programs for Specific Groups of Offenders and Their Families](#) (Slides available as [PDF](#))

# Digital literacy as a core competence to surviving and thriving on the outside

Dr. Bibi C. Reisdorf  
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Twitter: @bibireisdorf

# Overview

- The importance of digital literacy
- Digital Rehabilitation Model
- Research findings
  - Differences between digital literacy/technology experience by demographic (age, gender, sex, race)
  - The most pressing issues relating to digital literacy and access
- Trends
- Conclusion



# The Importance of Digital Literacy

- In technology-dependent societies, lack of access, skills, and usage opportunities is a disadvantage for anyone
- Internet is considered a utility that is fundamental to full participation in society, rather than a luxury
- Digital inequalities in levels of access, skills, usage, and outcomes are not equally distributed
  - Those who are better off already have more access, higher skills, broader/more usage, and benefit more from the internet
  - Sequential and compound model of digital inequalities



# The Importance of Digital Literacy

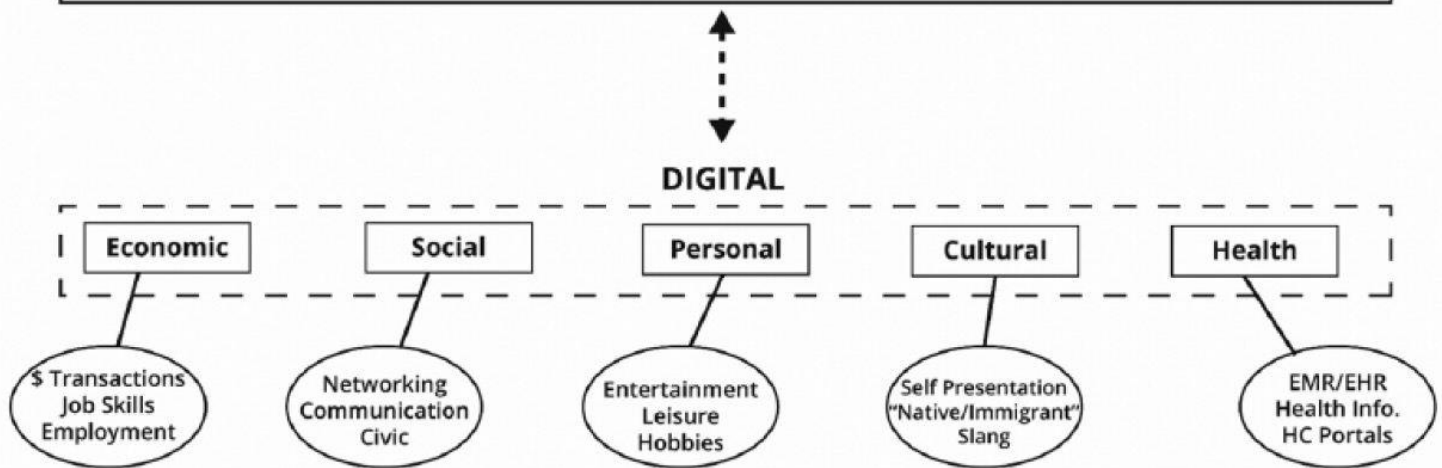
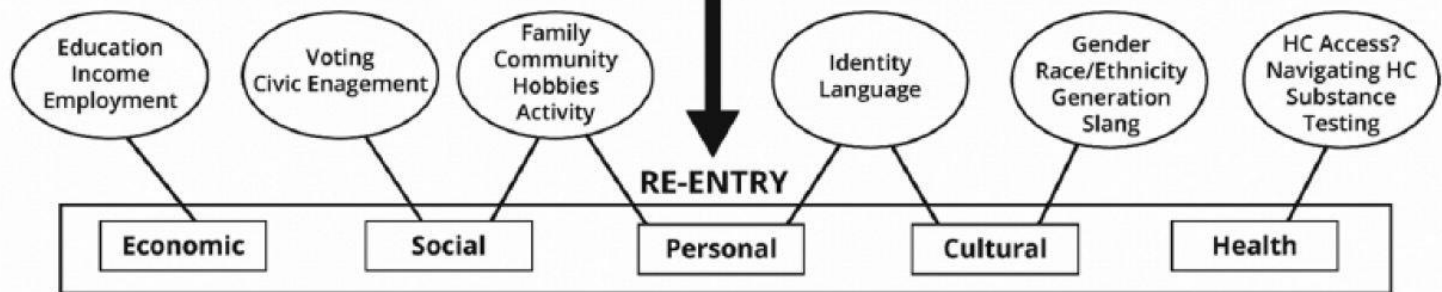
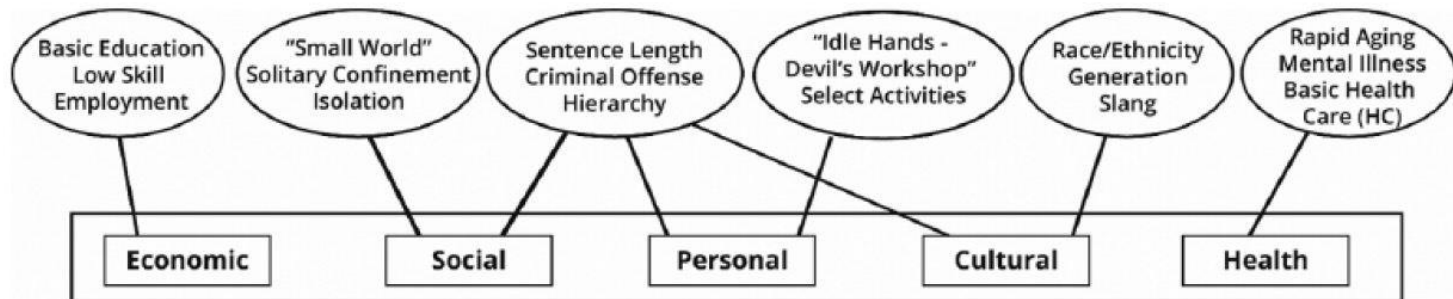
- Those most likely to experience digital inequity are the same demographics as those most likely to be incarcerated
- Supercharged digital exclusion during and post-incarceration due to digital deprivation during incarceration
- Technology moves at fast pace—affects even those who serve comparatively “short” sentences
- Formerly incarcerated people more likely to become victims of (online) scams, fraud, identity theft (e.g., Seo et al., 2020)
- “Stickiness” of criminal record due to digital world (e.g., Gurusami, 2019)




# Digital Rehabilitation Model

- General assumption: rehabilitation and reentry process mitigate negative effects of incarceration—at least to some extent—and facilitate return to society
- Incarceration has a negative impact on both offline and online realms across all fields identified in Helsper's (2012) model
- Model includes **two** offline realms: (1) prison realm and (2) reentry realm, as the former has an effect on the latter
- Digital realm is currently underutilized but could yield potential positive effects during reentry





 Fields  
 Resources

# Digital Rehabilitation Model





# Research Findings—The Data

- Scoping study of 3 prisons across Northern Ireland/England (2015)
  - Included currently incarcerated men and women; administrators; correctional officers
- Study with 73 returning citizens in the U.S. Midwest (2018)
  - Included 67 men and 6 women who had returned within 3 months of the study taking place
- Pilot study with 28 currently/formerly incarcerated men in the U.S. Southeast (2020; interrupted by COVID-19)
  - Participants took digital literacy classes (10h overall) during jail and received laptop upon release; data collected before/after class and post-incarceration



# Research Findings—Core Findings

- Access Barriers: Lack of access to internet and devices both during and post-incarceration
  - Prison “tablets” are not the same as digital technology on the outside
  - Wide proliferation of smartphones post-incarceration, but few computers
  - Provided laptop (as in 2020 study) made vast difference to returning citizens
- Skills Barriers: Lack of training during incarceration leads to lack of skills upon return
  - Even IF computer training was available, quality varied vastly by facility
  - BUT: Even basic training (as in the 2020 study) increased overall skills and confidence
  - Lack of training had a large impact on formerly incarcerated people during reentry
- Support (Barriers): Support was more readily available for those with strong family ties; higher skills overall



# Research Findings—Differences between digital literacy/technology experiences

- Younger returning citizens had fewer issues (re)adjusting to digital devices post-incarceration
- Strong impact of sentence length—the longer someone had been incarcerated, the more difficulties they experienced
- Men and women described similar struggles, but women also reported having a little more support
- From what we could tell, race did not make a difference, but available resources (income, education, employment, family support structures) did



# Research Findings—Most Pressing Issues

- Access and skills related to:
  - Job search and applications
    - Not being able to create or upload/attach resumes to online applications on phones
    - Inability to fill in job applications on computers due to not knowing how to use them
    - Timing out on library computers during job applications
  - Finding permanent housing
    - Many participants lived in temporary housing and were struggling to navigate online sites for rooms or apartments (e.g., worry about being scammed)
  - Finding useful information, such as through YouTube videos
    - YouTube was very popular among returning citizens to learn “anything” but needed help finding relevant and useful content
  - (Re)connecting with friends and family on social media
    - Unsure about “code of conduct” on social media—what is ok and what is not



# Additional Issues/Barriers

- Attitudes from prison staff and the public
- Correctional staff can misinterpret or oppose technology adoption, leading to implementation issues, even if technology was approved by administration (e.g., Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2016; Reisdorf & Jewkes, 2016)
  - Cases of using technology deprivation as punishment/measure of control
  - Cases of replacing in-person visits with digital, rather than an add on
- “Lesser eligibility” perception of incarcerated people by public
  - Perception of internet as a luxury that should be denied as punishment
  - Opportunity to educate public on value of enhancing digital literacy in correctional facilities for successful reentry (Hadlington & Knight, 2022)



# Concerning Trends

- Perception that providing prison tablets is the same as providing comprehensive digital literacy training—it's nowhere close
- Charging for educational content, entertainment, and connecting with loved ones on prison tablets
- Provision of “digital skills training” on outdated equipment and through books rather than learning by doing
- Only offering digital skills training post-incarceration



# Exciting Trends

- Increasing interest in provision of digital skills training for returning citizens and sometimes even pre-release
  - However, this appears to be a patchwork at the moment; training is offered here and there and at varying levels
- Increasing research interest—to provide good services, we need to work with evidence
- Inclusion of (formerly) incarcerated people in designing and running digital skills training



# Moving from Rehabilitation to Desistance

- Digital access and skills can aid in transition from just rehabilitation to desistance as a long-term goal
- Moving from surviving to thriving
  - (Digital) entrepreneurship is one such avenue many U.S. non-profits are now focusing on
- **BUT: *Technology is not a fix-all!***
  - Technology is unavoidable and can be a great tool, but the overall goal has to be to address the social inequities that contribute to criminal offending in the first place!







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## **Dr. Bianca Reisdorf's Answers to Supplementary Questions**

**Given that participation in digital programming is voluntary, does self-selection bias influence the results of research studies?**

To a certain extent, yes. I have met participants who were initially reluctant to do computer or Internet classes, but overall, there seems to be a general interest. However, we certainly miss the perspectives of those who choose to forgo these kinds of programs, even when they are offered. Future studies should try to include the voices of those who do not participate in these classes to learn why.

**For people who do not wish to participate, how can we encourage them to try the digital skills programs?**

There are various reasons people may choose not to participate. The most common reason I hear from non-users is that the programming is not useful for them or is not for people "like them." A more in-depth exploration is needed to understand the underlying reason for these beliefs. In many cases, individuals do not know where to start or how the digital world can benefit them. Some may be scared to break the only device their family has available. Others may have issues with general literacy. To encourage participation, I think it is most valuable if they hear from other people who have taken these courses, especially people they can relate to. They may be more inclined to participate if they see examples of how others have used technology to help with re-entry (e.g., getting a job, finding a job, applying for benefits).

**Do older people in prison and out in the community receive as much attention when it comes to digital skills training? If not, are stereotypes or ageism possible factors (e.g., thinking that older people don't need these skills, or that they can't learn, or that they aren't interested)?**

I have not noticed an age bias in terms of digital skills training during incarceration because training is voluntary and the advertisements inside facilities are not age-specific. That means that all eligible participants are equally encouraged to participate. We may see more bias post-incarceration because of the perception that older people may be less interested or will not need these skills as much for purposes of finding work.

Additional questions: [bianca.reisdorf@charlotte.edu](mailto:bianca.reisdorf@charlotte.edu)

# Digital Literacy in Finnish Prisons

Pia Puolakka

Senior Specialist, Head of Team

Safety, Security and Individual Coaching Team

Digital Literacy: Empowering Transition from Incarceration to Community, 28th Nov 2023



## Purpose of Prison and Probation Service

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- Reduce recidivism and support reintegration into the society
- Normality principle: prisoners must have equal access to public services like all citizens
- Prison concept: Prison as a learning environment for a life without crime
- **Smart Prison concept: Prison concept and services are enabled and supported by digital resources**
  - Access to public services digitally
  - More services for rehabilitation and education
  - Digital skills
  - Secured basic and human rights from inside prison



## GOAL

To improve the prisoners' ability to live without crime  
 > To decrease the risk of repeated offending

## HOW?

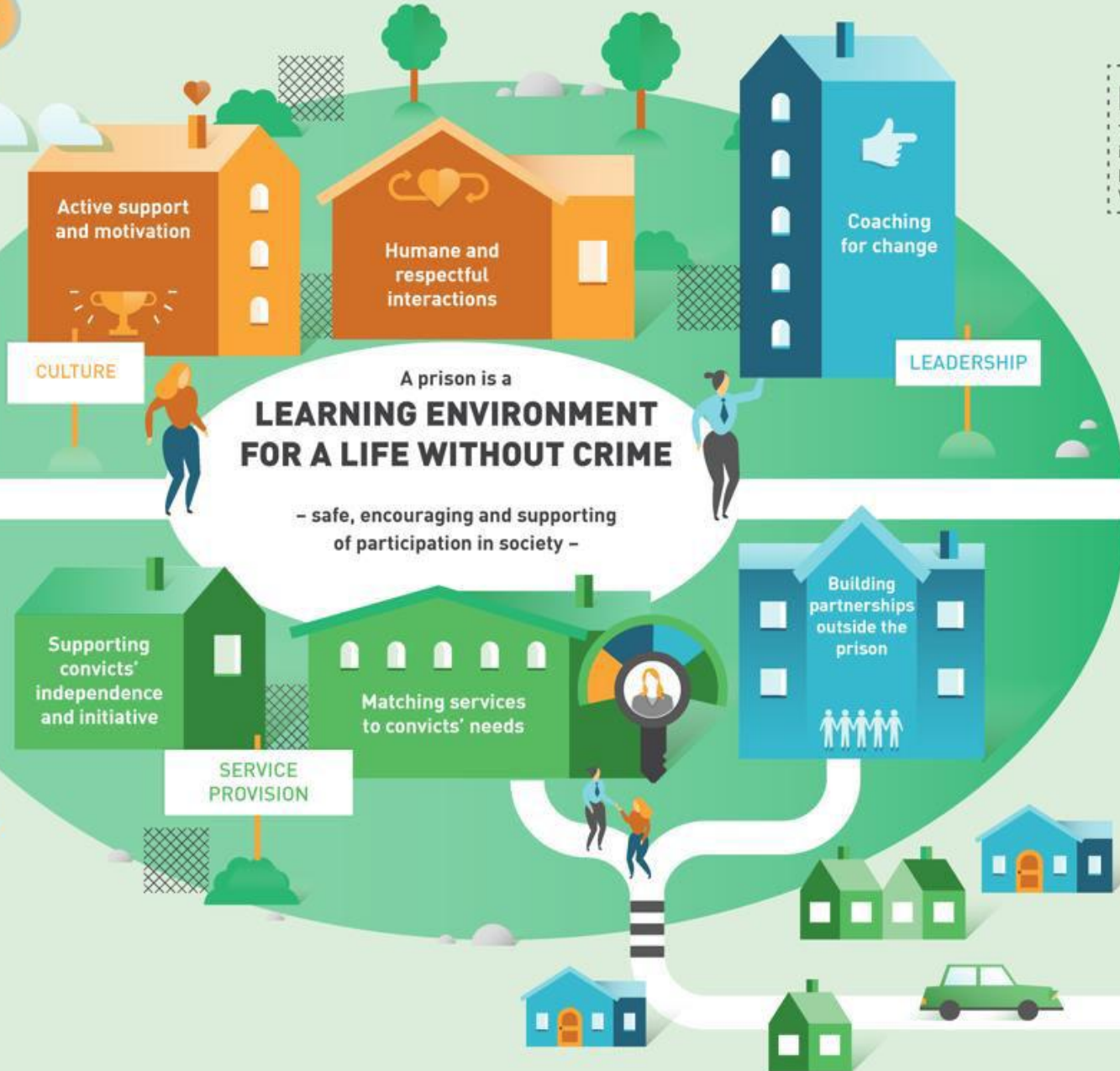
Effecting the probability of repeated offending is the foundation of everything. Effects are produced through...

## WHY?

The prison concept is based on Finnish Imprisonment act, which states that the goal of the enforcement of imprisonment is to increase the readiness of the prisoner to live a life without crime, by promoting the prisoner's ability to manage his or her life and by promoting his or her adjustment to society as well as to prevent the commission of offences during the term of sentence.

The concept is also informed by the four core values of Criminal Sanctions Agency:

- Respect for humanity
- Justice
- Belief in the ability of a person to change and grow
- Security



## FOR WHOM?

The concepts' beneficiaries include the society, the personnel of the prison as well as the prisoners.



**FOR THE PRISONERS**  
 Improved chances of participation in the society and of living without crime during and after the sentence.



**FOR THE PERSONNEL**  
 Sense of meaningfulness in work and opportunities for professional growth.

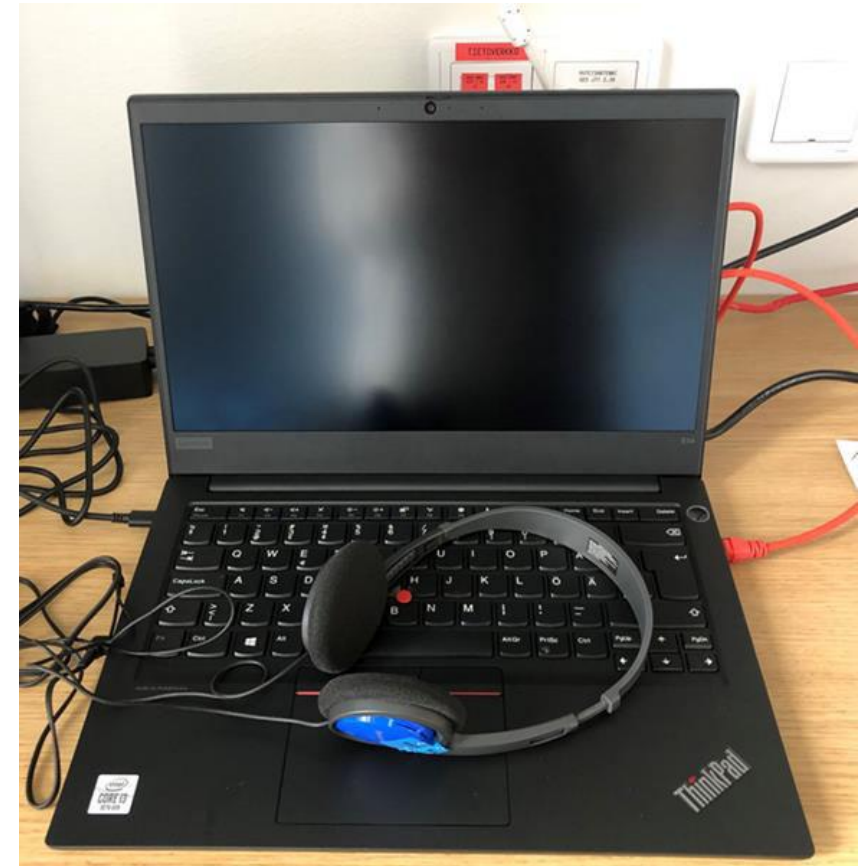


**FOR THE SOCIETY**  
 Safety and resource-effectivity that is measurable.



## DORIS

- Requests and other forms
- Chats
- Noticeboard
- Calendar
- Video calls
- Video meetings
- E-mail
- Material Bank
- Internet
- Open Office Tools
- Used in 3 prisons: 236 prisoners 333 staff members
- Additional Units: Health Care Services for Prisoners, Assessment Unit and Criminological Library



## Web-Based Services in DORIS

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- **Online education**
  - Online basic education
  - Moodle for high-school studies
  - E- and audiobooks
  - Basic courses on AI
- **Digital platforms by NGOs**
  - Digital skills
  - Life skills
  - Desistance
  - Gender specific rehabilitation
- **Suomi.fi –portal**
  - Social and civic services with strong electronic identification
- **Online consultation**
  - Social Insurance Office
  - Legal Advice
  - Family support
  - Neuropsychological rehabilitation
  - Aggressive behavior and organized crime desistance
- **Healthcare**
  - Digital platforms for mental health
  - Video consultation with Substance Rehabilitation Clinic
  - Contact to Prisoner Health Care Services for Prisoners

TH 1  
Substance use and  
addictive behaviour

TH 2  
Criminal thinking and  
values

TH 3  
Social and everyday  
life skills

TH 4  
Education and  
vocational skills

TH 5  
Health and well-being

TH 6  
Social relations, family  
and parenting

TH 7  
Reintegration to  
society

Whitelist

Self-help materials  
in electronic form

E-consultation  
inside and outside  
prison

Whitelist

Self-help materials in  
electronic form

Online rehabilitative  
program work inside  
prison

E-consultation with NGOs  
(gender specific)

Whitelist

Household care  
materials in  
electronic format

Online canteen

Calendar and  
Noticeboard

**Digital guidance**

Whitelist

**Basics of AI -course**

Moodle

E-learning and e-  
materials

E- and audiobooks

**Digital skills courses**

**Training AI**

Whitelist

Self-help materials  
in electronic form

E-consultation with  
prisoners'  
healthcare unit and  
other services

Online therapies

Virtual Reality, VR-  
assisted  
rehabilitation

Whitelist

Self-help materials  
in electronic form

Virtual visits with  
family members and  
other close ones

E-consultation with  
social services  
(childcare etc.)

Red Cross online  
peer groups

Whitelist

E-consultation with  
communal, judicial  
and social services  
(employment,  
housing etc.)  
- Kela-channel

E-consultation with  
NGOs

*E-consultation with  
experts by  
experience*



## Smart Prison Supports Digital Literacy

- Using Doris trains basic digital skills needed for the management of everyday affairs in prison and outside prison, a.k.a simulates outside prison daily digital life
  - Asking for appointment / advice etc.
  - E-mail
  - Video calls
  - Internet & looking for information
  - Paperwork and document management
  - Strong electronic identification
- Digital skills courses by NGOs
  - Basic office tools for writing your own papers like homework, judicial documents, CV etc.
  - E-services and strong electronic identification
  - Life skills learned on a digital platform
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy: Online courses on the basics of AI
- New vocational skills: Training AI as prison work

## Digital Literacy in Collaboration with NGOs

- **Silta Rehabilitation: Digital Desistance**
  - Supporting desistance with digital learning platform and digital skills
- **Silta Rehabilitation: RIKSU**
  - Gender specific rehabilitation and digital skills



## AI Literacy

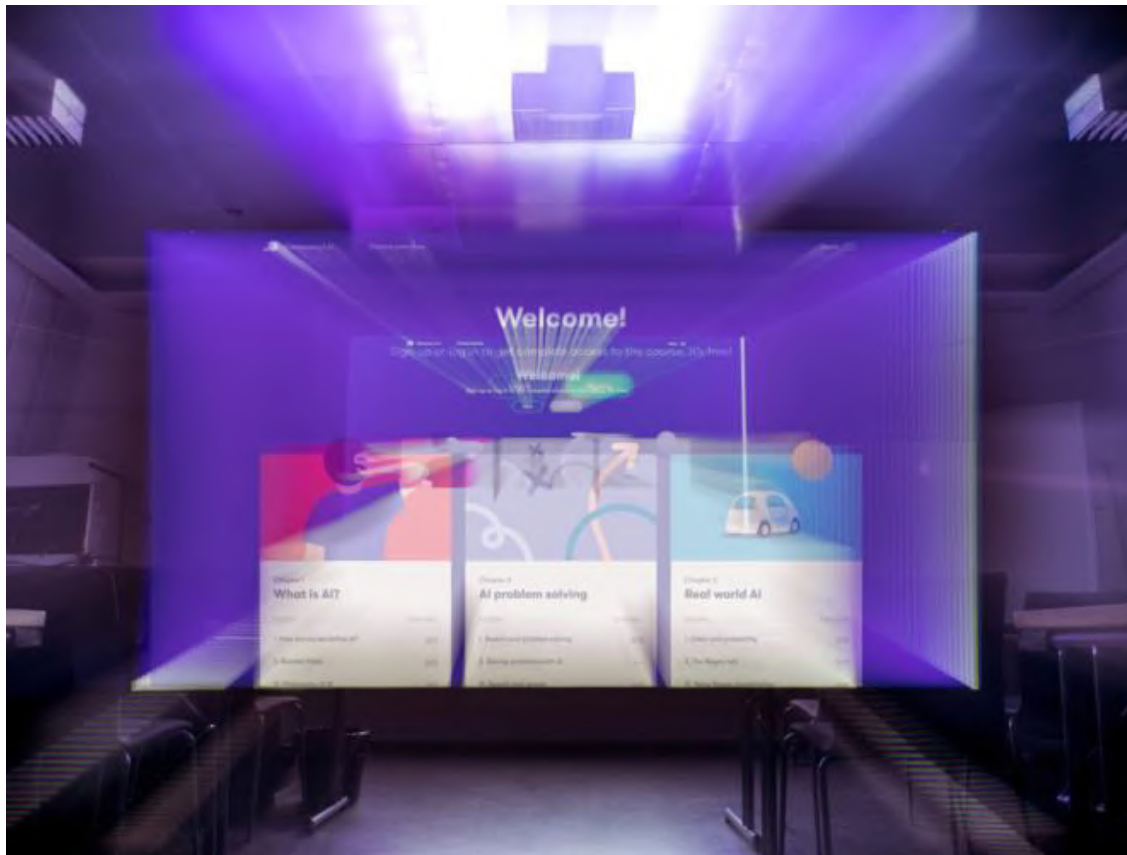


Photo: Matti Ahlgren / Aalto University

- 3 online courses (Helsinki University & Reaktor)
  - Elements of AI
  - Building AI
  - Ethics of AI
- Defining AI, Problem solving, Probabilities, Machine learning, Neural networks, Basics of Python, Future implications and Ethics
- Literacy, digital skills, cognitive skills
- For high-school level prisoners
- Can be combined with training AI work
- <https://www.elementsofai.com/>



### Chapter 1

## What is AI?

Section	Exercises
I. How should we define AI?	0/1
II. Related fields	0/2
III. Philosophy of AI	0/1



### Chapter 2

## AI problem solving

Section	Exercises
I. Search and problem solving	0/2
II. Solving problems with AI	---
III. Search and games	0/1



### Chapter 3

## Real world AI

Section	Exercises
I. Odds and probability	0/2
II. The Bayes rule	0/2
III. Naive Bayes classification	0/2



### Chapter 4

## Machine learning

Section	Exercises
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### Chapter 5

## Neural networks

Section	Exercises
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### Chapter 6

## Implications

Section	Exercises
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## Training AI



- Training AI algorithms as prison work in four prisons including Smart Prison Hämeenlinna
- In collaboration with Metroc -> Metroc provides training including AI basics
- Training material includes text material on construction markets and projects
- Prisoners learn digital, literacy and concentration skills
- Alternative work form for those prisoners who are unable to participate in more physical or group work
- Can support transition to more challenging prison work
- Research by Helsinki University

## Digital Literacy - Related Benefits

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- Building self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment
- Socializing and contact to outside -> Close ones and children
- Giving something meaningful to do during solitary time in the cell
- Staying informed about news and current events
- Securing basic and human rights
  - Education
  - Judicial help like contact to lawyers
  - Being able to use more services for rehabilitation and reintegration than provided inside prison
- Benefits for staff
  - Faster and more flexible work flows
  - More time for face-to-face communication
  - Trains digital literacy skills
  - Possibility to work from home and during exceptional situations
- Cost-effectiveness and reduced carbon footprint

## Challenges

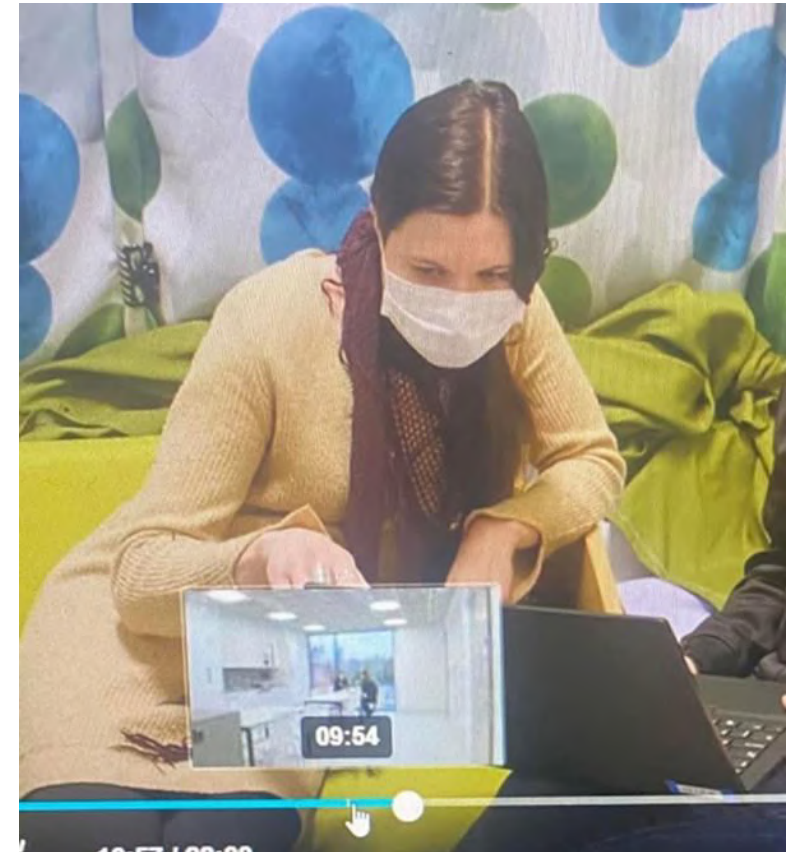
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- Foreign prisoners
- Elderly prisoners
  - 30+ (!) is already the line between digital-natives and non-digital-natives
- Misuse and abuse of digital devices
  - Cyber crime
  - Digital violence and harassment
- Attitudes
  - Failure's identity
  - Lack of initiative -> Online learning and rehabilitation requires more independence
  - Staff digital skills and attitudes (!)
- Ethical questions
  - Data protection and data security -> Especially with vulnerable groups
  - Face-to-face human contacts should still be the preferred and primary way of contacting
  - Use of AI -> Will revolutionize corrections in the near future!



## Doris Survey to Prisoners (Advancing Corrections, 14, 2022)

- 74 % uses daily, 100 % every week
- 95 % easy to use
- 84 % fast enough answer to requests and messages
- 95 % got enough help to use the system
- Most used: Requests, video calls, open office tools, material bank, e- and audiobooks, online canteen, online bank and other websites
- Positive: fast and flexible contact to staff and Health Care Unit, video calls to relatives, Internet, material to read and study
- Negative: connection problems, especially if during video calls
- Wishes: more possibilities for studying and streamed material like news and music





## Doris Survey to Staff (Advancing Corrections, 14, 2022)

- 42 % uses daily, 84 % daily or weekly
- 89 % easy to use
- 86 % easy to answer to inmates' messages and requests
- 87 % got enough help to use the system
- Positive: fast and realtime communication, video calls are easy to supervise, management of ward's schedules, all important material is reachable in material bank, possibility to contact inmates when working from home, sentence planning interviews and collaboration with partners via video calls
- Negative: more digital work = less face-to-face work?, connectivity problems, not all inmates follow messages etc. in the system



## Digitalization Supports Human Rights in Finnish Prisons (Advancing Corrections, 16, 2023)

- Doris provides me services that improve my rehabilitation during incarceration. **53 %**
- Doris helps me in studying. **56 %**
- Via Doris I can write my homework, notes, and paperwork. **56 %**
- Doris helps me in managing my daily matters during incarceration. **69 %**
- Via Doris I can keep better contact to my close ones. **73 %**
- Via Doris I can keep better contact to my children. **62 %**
- Via Doris I stay better informed about news and other current events around the world. **53 %**
- When I am alone in the cell, I can find meaningful activities via Doris (Internet connection, material bank, other utility programs). **60 %**
- **I think Doris helps me to take care of my rights and human rights during my incarceration. 60 %**

## Why do we do this?

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- Digital literacy is the new literacy
  - Without digital skills there's no chance for studying or vocational pursuits
- There's no inclusion in / transition to modern society without digital skills and devices
  - There's no equal rights without digital rights
- The next new literacy is AI literacy
  - AI will replace / renew some old work forms and bring new ones
  - Sufficient understanding of digitalization and AI is a matter of legal protection and equality: the ability to understand the basis of measures and activities concerning oneself (AI) and how to have influence on them

## Future Prisons – What Should They Be Like?

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- Smart Prisons concept should be extended to all closed prison units
- Use of AI should be used in an ethical way for positive and beneficial impact on both staff and prisoners
- All staff and prisoners are digitally and AI literate
- Digital collaboration with outside parties for equal services should enable “invisible walls”
- Prisons purpose should be to: 1) Provide a prison environment that corresponds as much as possible to the life outside, 2) Train prisoners for the life outside, to be able to live their lives without crime, 3) Enable them to meaningfully participate in the modern society in the same way as all other citizens and 4) Train the necessary skills during incarceration -> To fulfill these we need digital devices, services and skills for prisoners!

## Our story continues



- **Business Insider:** At prisons in Finland, inmates are learning AI and taking online tech courses as a bridge to life on the outside
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.businessinsider.com/finland-prisons-technology-ai-online-classes-2020-8?amp>



# LINNA

## Linna

▶ Katso: K1, J1

1 kausi · dokumentti · asia

Hämeenlinnaan noussut moderni vankila sai uudet asukkaat loppuvuodesta 2020. Vangit Lilja, Jane ja Mirella tekevät muuttoa väistötiloista odottavin mielin, samalla kun henkilökunta yrittää sopeutua muuttuviin olosuhteisiin ja erilaisiin työtiloihin. Vankilan portit käyvät ja myös Tiina ja Linda saapuvat suorittamaan vankeusrangaistuksiaan. Jokaisen vangin haaveena on vapaus, mutta sitä ennen on lusittava. Ohjaus: Piia Ketopaikka. Käsikirjoitus: Piia Ketopaikka, Minna-Ella Aaltonen.

Näytä lisää

🔗 Jaa ohjelma

❤️ Lisää suosikiksi

Jaksot Klipit

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Thank you!



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## **Pia Puolakka's Answers to Supplementary Questions**

**Please define “diginatives” in a bit more detail.** People who were born into a technologically advanced society in which use of the Internet and smart devices is widespread. Today these people are still under 30.

**In Finland, do people of all security classifications have similar access to digital programming?** We have different user rights for different prisoners using Doris. Some have Internet permission, some do not. The same applies to email and video call permissions.

**Is it possible for laptops or other digital devices to be physically taken apart and used for illicit purposes (e.g., to harm others)? Has this ever happened before?** In Finland, one prisoner tried to use a device charger to light his cigarette. Otherwise, there has been no illicit use or harm to others. Usually, if a device benefits the prisoner (like TV, phone, or laptop) they do not break it; they use other items for illicit purposes.

**How is person-to-person communication (e.g., email) managed for people in institutions?** We can easily restrict access to sending and receiving emails on a per-user basis. Prisoners must list which emails they want to send and which people they want to receive emails from. Also, all prisoner email is monitored in a special email box administrated by prison staff. The Finnish *Imprisonment Act* states that, in certain cases, staff can open and read prisoners' letters, including email, which is comparable to a digital letter.

**How is it possible to control URL access when so many websites are full of hyperlinks? It seems like a futile task.** The main interface is usually open/white-listed, with access to other sites granted only for legitimate purposes as defined by the *Imprisonment Act* (i.e., relevant for prisoners' social, health, educational, vocational, or rehabilitative needs). We have about 300-400 white-listed websites.

**With a focus on business-ready skills, is there sufficient attention to the digital skills that people need in other areas of their life, like access to healthcare and social opportunities? Is there too much focus on the needs of business rather than individuals? Who should come first?** Although we provide business-relevant skills (e.g., training AI), we mostly provide digital skills to help prisoners with their everyday lives (e.g., access healthcare, complete paperwork, contact a lawyer).

**Are participants in the programs encouraged to help one another? Do they ever take the lead and teach classes? This could be beneficial in terms of leadership, self-esteem, experience, co-operation, etc.** In Finland, skilled prisoners can help others to use Doris or complete digital courses.

**Can you explain a bit more about the gender-specific digital skills course?**

The program was for all prisoners who identify as women. Besides digital skills, the course covered topics like identity, self-esteem, boundaries, social skills, and well-being. Material was on a digital platform for self-study but was also discussed personally with course staff.

**Do staff have sufficient time to provide customized, one-on-one training with individuals who may have specific needs or challenges?**

Staff are encouraged to do this. Each year we train them to help prisoners use our digital devices and programs. When most staff have completed this training, prisoners do not need to depend on one or two staff for help.

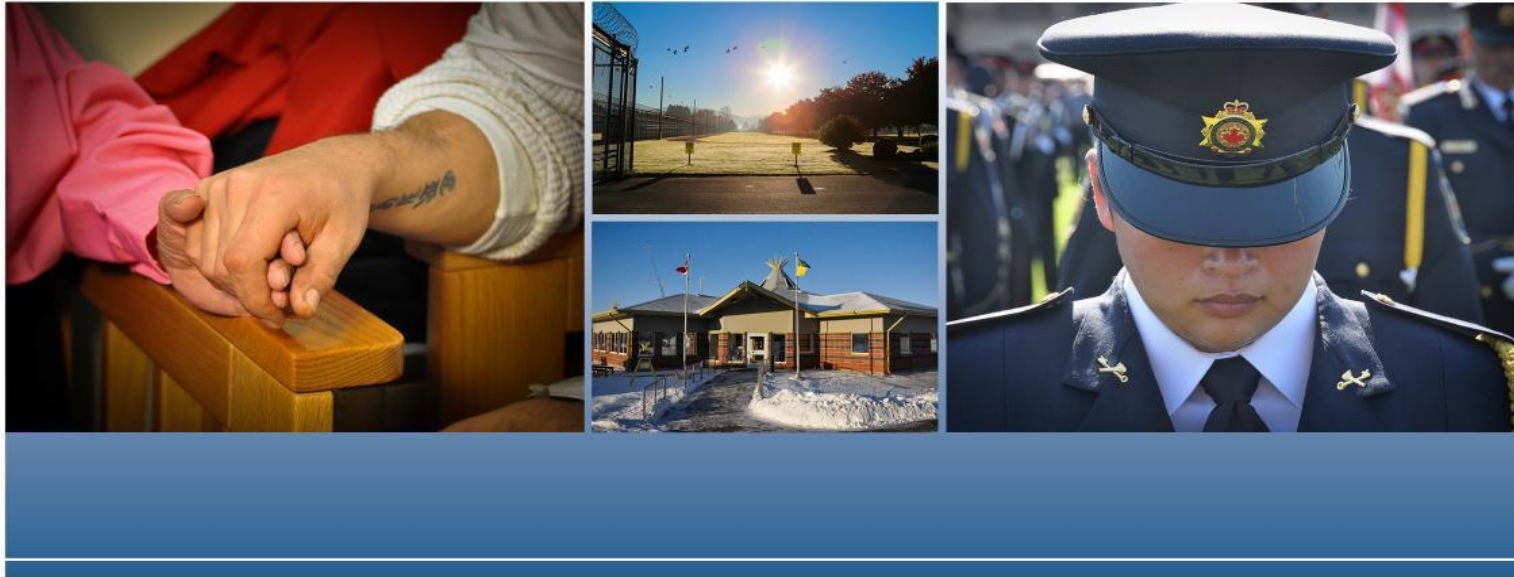
**What is the role of volunteers in advancing digital literacy skills and do they receive adequate training for this?** In Finland, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a very important role. They have their own expertise and funding.

Additional questions: [pia.puolakka@om.fi](mailto:pia.puolakka@om.fi)



# CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.



## Digital Education in CSC

November 2023



Correctional Service  
Canada

Service correctionnel  
Canada

Canada





# Overview

- Objective: To provide information related to the Correctional Service of Canada's Digital Education Project Pilot.
- Background
- Current status
  - Benefits for teaching staff
  - Benefits for offenders
  - Course availability
  - Partnerships
- Next steps
  - Offender Digital Education (ODE) initiative





# Commissioner's Mandate Letter (2022)

**“Work to enhance inmate **access to technology, including providing internet access, to facilitate their access to education,** programming and community supports, all of which are essential to their safe and effective rehabilitation and reintegration.”**

**“Improve access to post-secondary education and CORCAN vocational programming for offenders, and leverage community partnerships to connect those preparing for release with educational and employment opportunities.”**



# Digital Education Project Pilot

- CSC is modernizing its education programs and increasing offenders' access to digital education through the implementation of the Digital Education Project (DEP) pilot.
- The pilot has provided opportunities for CSC to innovate in the area of computer-assisted learning in a controlled manner and offers opportunities for offenders to gain foundational computer skills needed for increasing literacy levels.
- The pilot is accessible to all offenders who have an education need and who are located at an institution where the DEP pilot is available.



Restricted internet access (limited to specific authorized URL links).





# The Launch of DEP Pilot in CSC



- In 2020, CSC launched the DEP pilot in the Ontario Region.
- It is currently available in all minimum and medium institutions in Ontario.
- The pilot has also expanded to the Atlantic and the Pacific Region and will continue to expand across the country to enable more offenders to access digital education.



# The Benefits for Teaching Staff

- ✓ Increases the ability to adapt education courses to meet the needs of diverse offenders
- ✓ Gives teachers the opportunity to adapt learning materials to meet offender responsibility needs (i.e., disabilities and learning difficulties)
- ✓ Assists in building a course catalogue that is in line with provincial curriculum requirements and CSC policy for offender education
- ✓ Increases offender accountability, engagement and enthusiasm





# The Benefits for Offenders



- ✓ Opportunities to acquire digital and computer literacy skills
- ✓ Increases motivation, accountability and engagement
  - ✓ Building self-confidence in their capacity to learn
- ✓ Prepares them for community reintegration and employability
  - ✓ ABE level courses,
  - ✓ vocational skills,
  - ✓ life skills, and
  - ✓ preparation for post-secondary education
- ✓ Access to adapted content



# What is Available on the Platform?

## Micro-Credentials

- Short, competency-based training opportunities
- Workplace skills and provide real-world learning experiences

## Certifications

- Vocational
- Employability

## Credits

- High school
- College
- Vocational



# Back to Basics



---

## **Computer Basic Skills**

---

*Mouse Tutorial*

---

*Keyboarding*

---

*Word Processing*

---

## **Introduction to LMS**

---

*Navigating LMS*

---

*Navigating Courses*

---

*Uploading Assignments*

---

*Checking Grades and Feedback*

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# Good Learning Anywhere



Good Learning Anywhere (GLA) has partnered with CSC to provide course content specifically designed for Indigenous adult learners to:

- improve their vocational skills
- develop life skills
- prepare for post-secondary education



# Post-Secondary Opportunities



St. Lawrence  
College

**LOYALiST  
COLLEGE**





# Quotes from Students



*“The last time I used a computer was over ten years ago...Now here I am a decade later and I have completed Computer Basic Skills and I am now doing IC3. It is a big learning curve, but **I am feeling more confident, everyday.**”*



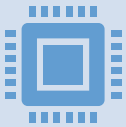
*“I am so happy that we have access to digital education. I am earning certificates and learning so much! **I am really proud of everything I have accomplished so far.** This is the **first time that I have ever completed something that I have started.** This is a big deal for me.”*



# Quotes from Students



*“I find the platform easy to use and understand. I have learned a lot of new things like making metric and imperial conversions. I will use this in everyday life. **I enjoy learning this way over books, any day!**”*



*“I have never used a computer before. In just a few short weeks, I am now able to turn the computer on, login, and get myself back into my course with little to no help. **This is a big accomplishment for me as I was always very afraid of computers.**”*



*“It’s been very beneficial for me – **I feel like I’ve overcome dyslexia. I can read now when I could hardly read before.** I like that I can focus on one subject at a time and work at my own pace.”*



# Next Steps



CSC will implement digital education on a national scale through the **Offender Digital Education (ODE)** initiative. The ODE will establish a secure, standardized, and national solution to provide offenders with access to digital education.



# Questions



## **CSC's Answers to Supplementary Questions**

### **As CSC is federal, why is the digital programming different across regions?**

While course offerings available through the Digital Education Pilot (DEP) may vary given the legislation and regulations from provincial ministers of education, CSC maintains a standard level of service and consistency by providing offenders with access to the same or similar education programs.

### **Do people of all security classifications have similar access to digital programming?**

The DEP pilot is accessible to all offenders who have an education need and are located at an institution where the pilot is available, such as minimum and medium security institutions in the Ontario Region and select institutions in the Atlantic and Pacific Regions. CSC will continue to expand the pilot across the country to enable more offenders to have access to digital education.

### **What work is being done to explore the universal application of various CSC digital learning programs in Ontario?**

CSC is monitoring the results of the DEP pilot to provide insight for the implementation of digital education nationally.

### **How is person-to-person communication (email) managed for people in institutions? There can be security issues involved.**

As offenders do not have access to email through the DEP pilot, this question is outside the scope of the DEP pilot.

### **How is it possible to control URL access when so many websites are full of hyperlinks? It seems like a futile task.**

The DEP pilot provides an opportunity for CSC to innovate in the area of computer-assisted learning in a controlled manner. The DEP pilot provides offenders with access to computers connected to a controlled, cloud-based learning platform that enables online and blended learning. Through secure and restricted Internet access, students can access course material on the digital platform.

**With a focus on business-ready skills, is there sufficient attention paid to the digital skills that people need in other areas of their lives, such as those that support access to healthcare and social opportunities? Is there too much focus on the needs of business rather than individuals? Who should come first?**

The DEP pilot supports offenders in achieving their educational goals, provides opportunities for offenders to gain computer skills needed for increasing their literacy levels, and modernizes the delivery of education programs. The DEP pilot promotes learning beyond traditional course offerings with a range of course material emphasizing diversity, inclusion, and employability, in addition to Indigenous course material. Additionally, the blended learning environment through DEP pilot promotes skill development and knowledge for potential employment opportunities, as well successful transition to the community as law-abiding citizens.

**Are participants in the programs encouraged to help one another? Do they ever take the lead and teach classes? This could be beneficial in terms of leadership, self-esteem, experience, co-operation, etc.**

Offenders work in small collaborative learning environments as a part of the DEP pilot, which encourages positive social interactions with peers. The blended learning environment through the pilot promotes skill development and knowledge for potential employment opportunities, as well successful transition to the community as law-abiding citizens.

**Do staff have sufficient time to provide customized, one-on-one training with individuals who may have specific needs or challenges?**

The DEP pilot uses a blended classroom environment, linking the traditional classroom approach with modern technology and independent learning. Through the pilot, offenders have the opportunity to learn independently, while still having access to a teacher's guidance and support, including one-on-one support if needed.

**What is the role of volunteers in advancing digital literacy skills and do they receive adequate training for this?**

Within CSC, teachers deliver education programs, including the DEP pilot.

Additional questions: [James.Woodland@CSC-SCC.GC.CA](mailto:James.Woodland@CSC-SCC.GC.CA)



PARTNER WITH THE LAST MILE

**HIRING & APPRENTICESHIP  
PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**



BUILDING COMMON GROUND

# ABOUT TLM & OUR SHARED VALUES

---

The Last Mile (TLM) is an Oakland, CA based 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to provide opportunities for personal and professional growth for justice-impacted individuals through education and technology training. Through prison education, transitional support and workforce reentry, TLM is disrupting the system of mass incarceration across the United States. In-classroom curricula and course material prepare students for meaningful employment in modern job roles including web development, software engineering and audio and video production. Students cultivate personal and professional development in alignment with the technical education and with the support of TLM reentry staff, volunteers, and a community founded on shared lived experience.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN CHAMPION THE VALUES OF INCLUSIVITY,  
OPPORTUNITY, AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE.**

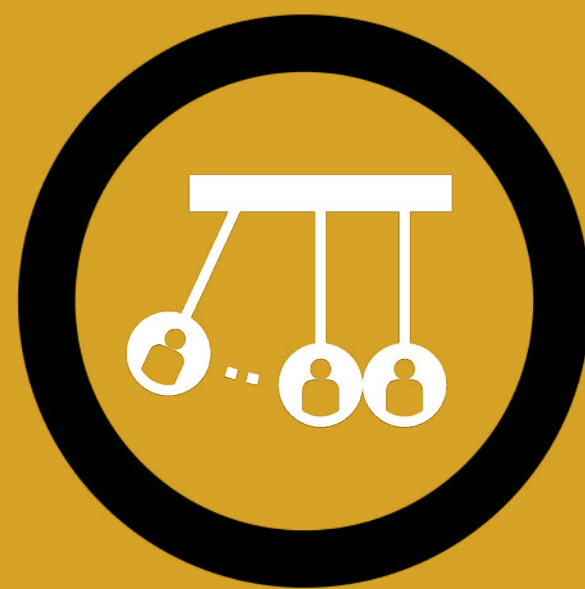






# BENEFITS OF FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT

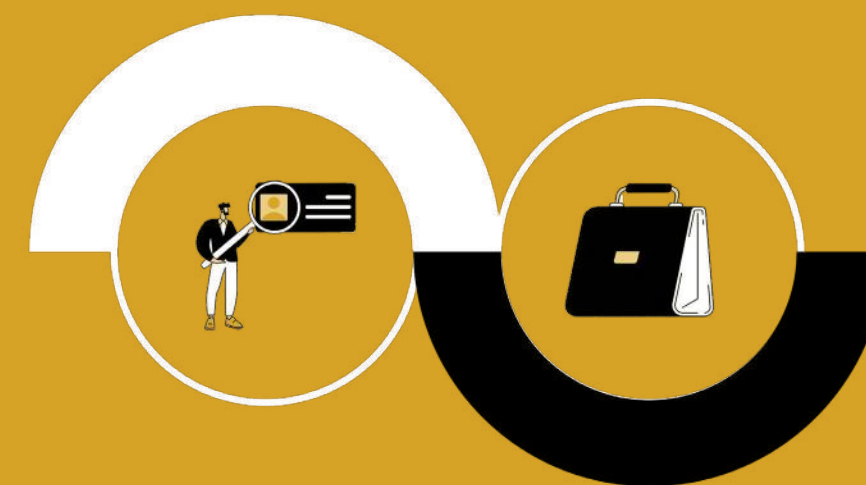
Fair chance hiring was federally established in 1975 using three factors to determine hiring which include (1) the nature and gravity of the offense or conduct, (2) the time that has passed since the offense and/or completion of the sentence and (3) the nature of the job held or sought. In 2023, California expanded upon this and defined requirements for additional considerations as they relate to each individual. Compliance with federal and state mandates protects the employer, but it also encourages equality of access to opportunity and increases creativity and innovation by reducing the prevalence of homogeneous teams and workplaces. Benefits to the employer include:



**SOCIAL  
IMPACT**



**INNOVATIVE  
PROBLEM SOLVING**



**INDUSTRIOUS  
WORKFORCE**



**NON-TRADITIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES**



ABOUT THE ALUMNI

# PROGRAM & EDUCATIONAL OVERVIEW

The Last Mile Web's Development Program and Audio and Video Production Program cultivate graduates that are prepared for their respective industries upon reentry. Alumni of the program complete rigorous coursework to develop key technical skills as well as interpersonal and leadership skills.



## AUDIO & VIDEO PRODUCTION SKILLS

- Viable skills for the audio and video production industry
- Fundamentals of audio engineering, audio post-production, and techniques for mixing music & spoken-word audio
- Proficiency with Avid Pro Tools
- Fundamentals of video post-production: video editing, sound design, and digital imaging
- Proficiency with DaVinci Resolve



## WEB DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

- Responsive web design with HTML, CSS, and Bootstrap
- UX/UI theory and design
- DOM manipulation, data structures, and programming logic with JavaScript and jQuery
- Supplemental content on Python, TypeScript, RegEx, and Algorithms
- Servers, modularization, and package management with Node, NPM, and Express
- Code testing with REST clients and Mocha
- Powerful, maintainable frontend frameworks with React
- Database management with MongoDB and Mongoose



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Resume and portfolio building
- Collaboration, giving and receiving feedback
- Presentation skills, public speaking & communication training
- Controlling and owning your narrative
- Continuing education
- Reentry support





FAIR CHANCE HIRING PARTNERSHIPS

# HIRING & APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Become a *TLM Fair Chance Hiring Partner* today. Through these partnership opportunities, your company provides direct impact that fundamentally changes the landscape contributing to mass incarceration. There is an opportunity for an organization of every size and any infrastructure, including:

- FULL-TIME ROLES
- MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
- APPRENTICESHIPS FOR SPECIALIZED ROLES

PARTNER



All trademarks are property of their respective owners





EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

# CONTENT PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

Partner with TLM and other leading institutions and platforms like [Partner Name], [Partner Name] to provide top-tier education. Content and curriculum needs include:

- **ADVANCED CODING**
- **ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS**
- **COMMUNICATION TRAINING**
- **ADVANCED AUDIO AND VIDEO PRODUCTION**
- **SPECIALIZED WORKSHOPS BASED ON INDUSTRY NEEDS**

**PARTNER**

Grow with **Google**

**Bank of America** 

**LinkedIn** Learning



**SiriusXM**

Frontend **Masters**

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SUPPORT POST-RELEASE

# HOW TLM SUPPORTS IN REENTRY



## PRE-RELEASE

- Transition planning
- Grow with Google Digital Skills
- Resume reviews
- Interview preparation
- Preparing for the board



## GOAL PLANNING

- SMILE balance  
*(Social, Mind/body, Intellectual, Leisure, Economic)*
- Asynchronous upskilling
- Tech interview/assessment preparation
- Online portfolio building
- LinkedIn profile and networking
- Continued education programs/scholarships



## INTAKE AND ORIENTATION

- Technical assessments
- Digital skills assessment and training
- Connection with TLM alumni peer community
- Weekly virtual one on one meetings with an advocate
- Strategic resource alignment



## ONGOING SUPPORT

- Community events
- Impact measurement
- Financial literacy
- Professional development workshops
- Speaking engagements



# THE LAST MILE ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES



## KEEFE DASHIELL

Keefe is relentless in his commitment to helping others and advancing his own professional development. He is a pillar of TLM's community: his positive attitude, sense of humor, and collaborative spirit have accelerated him along the way to secure a role at Cash App. His growth mindset was clearly demonstrated as he quickly transitioned the skills he had into learning mobile development on the job during the apprenticeship. Keefe never stopped asking questions and learning about the work. He impressed Cash App enough to convert to full time Android developer in a short period of time.



Keefe regularly meets with returned citizens when they are first released to talk about the challenges and successes that he found in order to help them prepare for their careers.

## AMALIA BRYANT

With the help of TLM's reentry team, Amalia set clear short term goals that directed her path to success and a career as a software engineer at Checkr. She worked with a professional mentor, completed Hack Reactor (a notoriously difficult boot camp), and finally an apprenticeship that converted to full-time employment due to her work effort and skills.



Amalia is now paving the way for other returned citizens in TLM's community who are looking to find careers in tech. She has become a source of support and an excellent example of accomplishment.



# THE LAST MILE ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES



## LINDA WOO

Linda Woo secured an apprenticeship with Plaid less than 1 year after her release. She was able to convert to a full-time Plaid employee after 6 months.

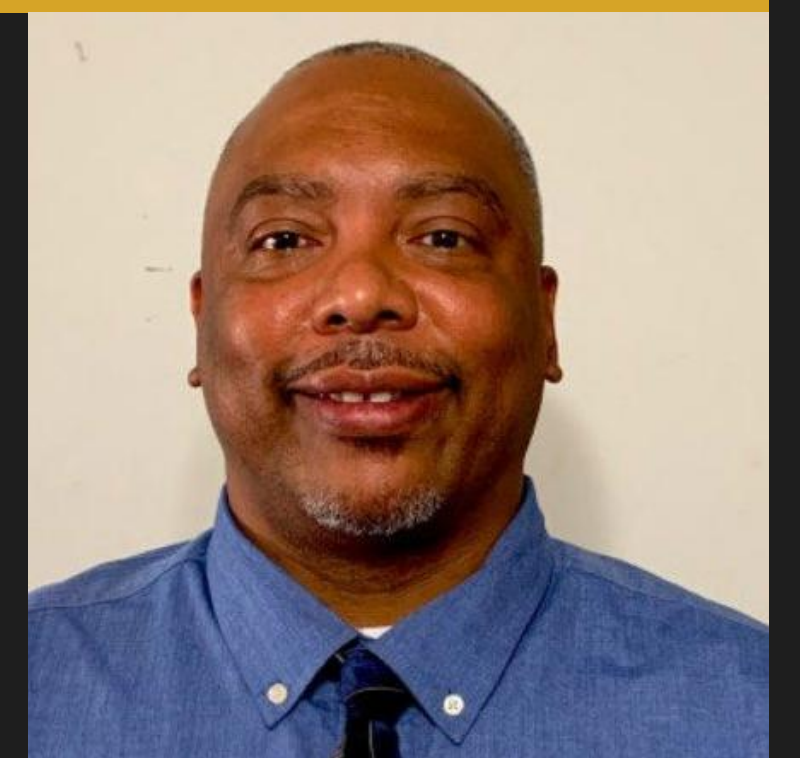
Linda performed at such a high level that Plaid went on to hire another TLM alumni for an apprenticeship. Linda was a part of the hiring process for this and has continued to support and welcome him throughout his apprenticeship.



## SHAWN WILSON

Shawn stayed focused on his goal throughout his exceptionally challenging reentry.

He completed a year-long software engineering program and secured an apprenticeship at Code Black Indy where he uses his technical skills and warm, joyous spirit to teach under-resourced children how to code.





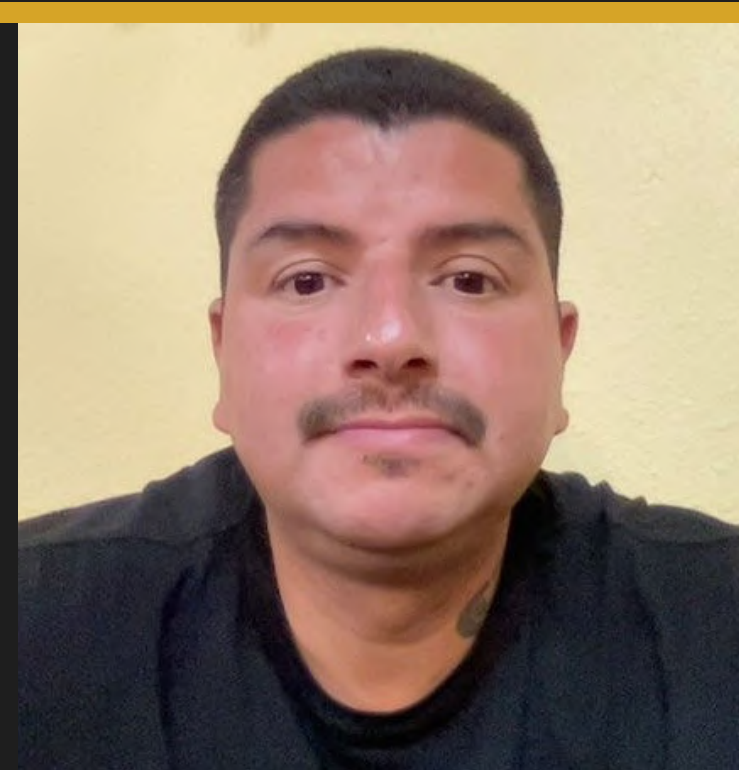
# THE LAST MILE ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES



## ROBERT GARCIA

Robert's final project in The Last Mile demonstrated his heart, and desire to give back to his community. From the minute he connected with the TLM Reentry Department, they worked together focusing on his goal of finding work in the tech sector that included his passion for doing mission-driven work. He continued his education and worked hard to expand his technical skills. His effort paid off in less than 1 year, when he was offered an opportunity that was the perfect marriage of his passion and goals.

Edovo, a mission-driven tech company, accepted Robert into a software engineering apprenticeship where he collaborates closely with the Edovo team.



**edovo**



*Three TLM alumni who are full-time employees with TLM fair chance hiring partner, Slack.*





PAVE THE ROAD WITH US

# NEXT STEPS

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The Last Mile is celebrating more than a decade as an organization, originating with its first program in San Quentin State Prison in California. The Last Mile has continued to leverage the power of public-private partnerships as it has expanded across the United States. Join us as we *Imagine, Build and Open Doors*, for justice-impacted individuals through employment opportunities and workforce development. Next steps include:

- INITIAL CONSULTATION WITH TLM TEAM
- CUSTOMIZING PROGRAMS TAILORED TO YOUR ORGANIZATION
- FACILITATE HIRING OR APPRENTICESHIPS
- ENGAGE IN MENTORSHIP AND SKILL-SHARING
- CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK AND COLLABORATION FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT





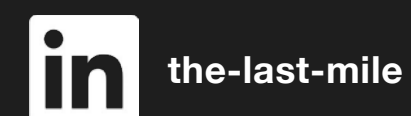
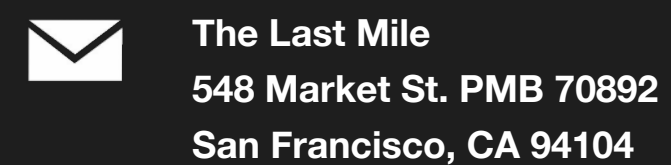
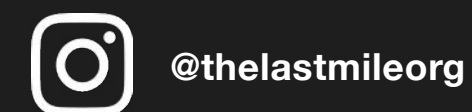
# THE LAST MILE IS BUILT ON COMMUNITY.

Thank you. Your partnership ensures that TLM continues to disrupt the system of mass incarceration one person at a time.

---

PARTNER

## STAY IN TOUCH



## Submission to Prison Journal- Special Issue

### **Public Acceptability of Prisoners' Access and Use of Digital Technologies in UK**

Hadlington L, Knight V. Public Acceptability of Prisoners' Access and Use of Digital Technologies in the UK. *The Prison Journal*. 2022;102(2):237-255.

doi:10.1177/00328855221079290

Link to final published article: [Public Acceptability of Prisoners' Access and Use of Digital Technologies in the UK - Lee Hadlington, Victoria Knight, 2022 \(sagepub.com\)](https://doi.org/10.1177/00328855221079290)

Dr Lee Hadlington- Nottingham Trent University, UK

Dr Victoria Knight- De Montfort University, UK<sup>i</sup>

#### **Abstract**

Prisons and its people are subject to digital inequalities whereby the distribution of Information Communication Technology (ICT), access, uptake and skills is restricted by strict regulations to control use. Two hundred and thirty-seven participants took part in our study on prisoners' access to digital technology. A scale (Attitudes Towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments (ATD-ISE)) was developed to assess attitudes towards the use and implementation of digital technology in prisons. We observed there is a potential opportunity to inform and educate the public on the value of enhancing digital literacy within our prisons for the benefit of rehabilitative outcomes.

**Key Words: Prison, digital technology, public opinion, digital divide,**



# Submission to Prison Journal- Special Issue

## Introduction

### People and Their Relationships with Technology

Technology is not neutral. It impacts on our social, psychological, economic and political lives and contexts. As a result, our perceptions and attitudes towards use tell us something about the value placed on technology in varying contexts such as economic, cultural, social and personal (see Helsper, 2012). The reach of technology is now extensive resulting in transformation in our homes, schools, hospitals, and workplaces. As a consequence our attitudes towards technology are diverse and complex. For example, parents seek to restrict, supervise and limit access for their children; some workplaces restrict employees' access to the Internet and tight security measures are built in to educational settings. These practices are linked to attitudes of use, and so risk is managed to reduce harm particularly for 'vulnerable' groups. These technological restrictions apply acutely to our prisons (Knight, 2015).

According to experts on digital inequality (Selwyn, 2004), our beliefs and values about technology are complex and woven (or not) into our everyday lives. The manner in which organizations and policy makers respond to technology contributes to how we talk about or 'frame' technology within popular and policy discourses. In many respects, these discourses can polarize the ways in which we understand technology – that it is good for us (optimist) OR it is bad for us (skeptic). The following section provides the context for technology within prison settings, discussing concepts that have particular resonance for people in prison.

## Submission to Prison Journal- Special Issue

### **Context of digitization in prisons**

Small pockets of digitization in carceral settings are evolving, with some services for people in prison becoming established, such as self-service kiosks, email, and video conferencing (Knight, 2015). The advent of COVID-19 has brought an increased demand for digital services such as video calls as a result of strict social-distancing policies (Knight, 2020). However, these developments remain small and localized (see Mann 2017). Molleman and van Os' (2016) global survey of prison services outlines the significant digital disparities across most jurisdictions. The authors found that most areas use technology for information management systems. Unsurprisingly, prisoners' use of technology is still very restricted to those countries in developed areas. Development is slow, and the penal digital revolution is slowly unfolding and is certainly uneven. The reasons for these disparities are complex which present a number of challenges for prison managers and policy makers. Further, such challenges are also deeply rooted by concerns of how prison digitization initiatives, interventions, and their investments are perceived by the public. With many jurisdictions' experiencing growth in prison populations that typically presents a range of complex vulnerabilities, plans to invest in digitization are perceived to be contentious and sensitive (see Funnell, 2017).

There is a long history of cautious correctional system response to development, particularly in relation to digital and communications technologies. Mechanisms like the 'separate and silent system' and strict controls to limit prisoners' access to mediated technologies like print media, radio, and television represent emotive organizational responses to prisoners' communicative rights (Knight, 2016). Access to digital services across many jurisdictions remains privileged and no prison

## Submission to Prison Journal- Special Issue

service provides a blanket provision. This, as Martin Narey describes, the former Head of the Prison Service in England and Wales, is framed by fear

*When I joined the prison service in 1982, people were terrified of allowing prisoners to have FM radios... (Saul, 2015,)*

In many respects services can become paralyzed by these perceived attitudes, and political rhetoric can stifle change due to the fear of being accused of going 'soft' on crime.

Penal populism has been used to describe this kind of response. As a result,

*...penal populism was effectively mediated and translated into law, rather than writing it itself. In doing so, government officials brought into play some of their own interests as well as those of other less visible interest groups (Pratt & Clark , 2005, 310)*

Notably, public thinking about prison services and the impact on communities matters. Yet, as many public opinion surveys demonstrate, public views about prison are ambivalent and contradictory, and there are low levels of confidence in the penal system. In sum, the view is that prison 'doesn't work'. It is significant that the ways in which opinion is measured is varied with some surveys seeking opinion, attitude, acceptance, receptiveness or sympathy (see Roberts and Hough, 2011). In the next sections, we review some key findings from a range of public surveys and reflect on our findings regarding the public's views on prisoners' access to digital technologies. How receptive is the contemporary public with respect to prisoners' access to digital technology? For the public 'consumer,' can prison 'work' with digital technologies deployed as a rehabilitative intervention?

## Submission to Prison Journal- Special Issue

### **What the public thinks about prison and imprisonment**

As Jewkes (2013) points out, our experience of prison is second-hand--delivered as re-presented experiences, via the mass media. Thus, 'prisons continue to be constructed in popular and political discourse within a very narrow framework' (Jewkes, 2007, 447). The extent to which this is helpful is debatable, and this often means that opinion can become skewed. As Roberts and Hough (2005) suggest, the public on the whole are unfamiliar with the prison system. Jewkes explains that,

*When it comes to 'real' or 'realistic' representations of imprisonment, which many inmates experience as brutalizing, dehumanizing and intolerable, public indifference prevails and some of the worst atrocities go unnoticed and unchecked. (Jewkes 2007, 448)*

This lack of understanding means that certain discourses get recycled into the public's imagination, for example believing that prison is easy, people in prison are idle and incarceration does not work. This then equates to low levels of public confidence- cynicism and skepticism in the prison system and what it is capable of doing (Roberts and Hough, 2005). These narratives of imprisonment are powerful and can manipulate how punishment (and rehabilitation) are delivered. Whilst this is important, the synchronicity of opinion and action become misaligned. Public opinion research in the United States found that rehabilitation is rated a priority, followed by deterrence; punishment was considered the lowest priority (Maguire, 1995).

Flanagan and Caulfield (1984:31) discuss the 'improper use of public opinion data,' and warn that such surveys should not conflate the complexity of the public's views of prison policy. This highlights the need for such surveys to be triangulated, with qualitative accounts that enable social scientists to expand knowledge with

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respect to the origins of public sentiments about prisons. Moreover, these explorations should also be redirected not just at the punitive end of the issue but also fully explore how rehabilitation is conceived and understood.

### ***Use of Prison***

Generally, there is a lack of public confidence in criminal justice (RCP 2002 in Allen, 2013). On the whole, the public perceives imprisonment to be disruptive and it extends opportunities to continue criminal deviancy (Roberts and Hough, 2005). Herein, 'public punitiveness' driven by social responses that demand a lowering of the custodial threshold by sending people to jail for less serious offences have resulted in restrictive measures in prison policy (Roberts and Hough, 2011: 182). Public opinion surveys, however, counter 'tough talk' but actually highlight sensitivity and leniency towards offenders of crime (Roberts and Hough, 2011). In our review of studies on public attitudes we observed that respondents in such surveys are not as punitive as discourses may portray. There is an understanding of rehabilitation and the need to deploy justice services to address social problems. Yet these kinds of studies fail to disrupt the framing of punitive agendas.

Public views also highlight that skewed perceptions undermine 'the penal value of imprisonment' (Hough and Roberts 2005:292). These softened perceptions of imprisonment can 'become a source of *penal escalation*' (Hough and Roberts, 2005:292 *emphasis* in original). The consequences mean that amenities that might facilitate useful and effective services and support for the incarcerated can become restricted. As Hough and Roberts warn, it is therefore necessary for the public to have a realistic idea of the nature of life in prison' (Hough and Roberts, 2005:292). Despite

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this, surveys highlight that the public does not necessarily support restrictions and enhanced deprivations. This oversimplification, as some commentators argue, strengthens penal populism to boost political favour. Research in the United States suggests that the public does not want people in prison to be without air-conditioning (Applegate, 2001) or televisions and physical exercise (Doble Research Associates, 1995). They conclude that pathways to desistance through rehabilitation are necessary under secure conditions. These restrictions as viewed by the public are not extended to denying people in prison civic participation i.e. the right to vote (Manza et al, 2004). Roberts and Hough conclude that there is 'ambivalence about extending the use of imprisonment' (2005:301).

### ***Prison Conditions***

Roberts and Hough's (2005) analysis of public opinion of prison offers a helpful review, and they conclude that the public's awareness of prison does not mean they have a grasp of what goes on inside and how this is experienced. Their study notes views of the prison as inaccurate and negative, with little grasp of the day-to-day deprivations and pains that incarceration can create. The public underestimates the severity of prison life (Roberts and Hough, 2005 : 290 ).

### ***Cost of prison***

Building more prisons as a solution to crime is not regarded highly by the public. For example, in one study, one in ten were found to think that prison reduces crime (Mori, 2003). The public is sensitive to cost of dealing with crime (Roberts and Hough, 2011:193), and many surveys on prison focus on this aspect (see Nagin et al, 2006). A number of US surveys suggest that the public are *willing to pay* for better mechanisms



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for assisting rehabilitation (Roberts and Hough, 2005). Allen (2013) describes how education is perceived to be a valid and credible way to enabling rehabilitation and thus a worthy investment.

### **What shapes public attitudes of prison?**

Much less is known about the shaping of these views, and most explanations point towards the fact that our insights into prison are received second hand (Allen, 2013). The diversity of opinion can be explained by varying attitudes across different jurisdictions. For example, the UK public are more in favour of imprisonment compared to other countries (Van Kesteren et al, 2000). Economic situations also impact our attitudes towards offenders of crime. For example, in periods of prosperity and optimism, the public tend to be more sympathetic to offenders. Demographic characteristics also shape how people view the criminal justice system. Wood and Viki (2001) found that older people tend to be more punitive than younger people, and those that work in manual occupations tend to be more punitive. They also report that heavy television viewers and especially those that consumed crime programmes demonstrate increased desires to be more punitive towards offenders. However, being a victim of crime does not necessarily lead to more punitive attitudes (Allen, 2013). The consumption of newspapers is also an indicator. For example, broadsheet newspaper readers see increasing prison numbers as a bad idea (Mori, 2003). The following section describes this study's public survey to explore attitudes on prisoners' use of digital technology in prisons. The intent is to assist policy makers, service providers, and key stakeholders to understand how their current tax-payers and citizens perceive this development. Knight and Van De Steene (2019:38) undertook a

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survey of correctional ICT managers and found that their informed status did indicate less punitive attitudes towards prison digitization.

### **Method**

#### Participants

Two hundred and thirty-seven participants took part in this study on prisoners' access to digital technology, all of whom were recruited through Qualtrics Research Panels. The sample was stratified for age ranges (25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64), and comprised 116 males and 121 females. The age range for participants was 25-64 years with a mean of 43.16 ( $SD = 10.882$ ). Qualtrics Research Panels is recognized as an industry leader in the field of data collection, and were chosen for both speed of data collection and robustness of the sampling. All responses were screened at the point of participation by Qualtrics to remove any individual that completed the survey too quickly, or who responded repetitively to more than 80% of the questions asked in the survey. Participants received a small reimbursement for their time of approximately £4. Participation in the Qualtrics panel is open to anyone who enrolls on their system, but obviously is restricted to those with internet access. However, as the research focused directly on aspects of digital inclusion and digital literacy, we felt that individuals with direct knowledge of the digital environment would be more relevant to the nature of the study.

Of the complete sample, 60% reported their occupational status as being full-time employed, 16% were part-time employed. 4% Self-Employed, 14% Unemployed and 6% were retired. All participants were residents in the UK. We recognize that this

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might not be entirely representative of the UK population. Due to the limited size of our sample, we acknowledge that this is a snapshot of the population.

### **The Scale: Attitudes Towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments (ATD-ISE).**

A scale was developed for the purposes of this study to assess key factors associated with attitudes towards the use and implementation of digital technology in secure environments. An initial 33-item scale was produced and included questions designed to probe attitudes related to aspects of security, prisoner rehabilitation, prison environment and financial implications (see [Attitudes towards Digital Technology in Secure Environments Scale \(ATD-ISE\). \(dmu.ac.uk\)](#) to access full scale). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree). Example items included “I think that the use of digital technology in prisons could serve to improve prisoners' quality of life” and “I think that giving people in prison access to digital technologies could reduce reoffending rates”. For the 33-item scale, a Cronbach’s alpha of .905 was obtained, indicating good reliability. Possible scores on the ATD-ISE range from 33-165, with a higher score indicating a more negative attitude towards digital technology use in secure environments. The Cronbach’s alpha calculation is an internal reliability check of the questionnaire. It is carried out to ensure that all of the items included are ‘related’ to one another (see Calvani, et al 2008).

### **Procedure**

The above materials were combined into one survey that was distributed online via Qualtrics Research Panels during a one-week period in February, 2017. Participants were given full details of the aims for the study, as well as being informed about their

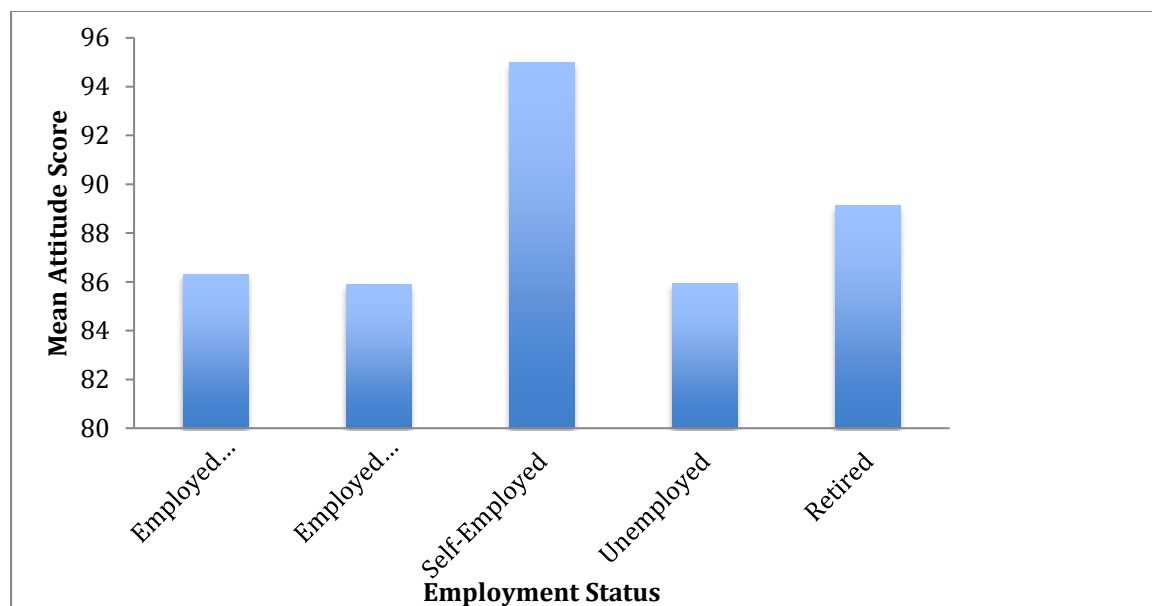
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right to withdraw and informed consent. Upon completion of the study, participants were presented with a full debrief sheet.

### Results

The means for the ATD-ISE by employment status are displayed in Figure 1 below, and for age ranges in Figure 2. The overall mean for the ATD-ISE was 86.747 (SD = 19.04). We can see that those individuals who are self-employed have a more positive attitude to digital technology use in prisons, with the unemployed and employed having a poorer attitude.

Figure 1: Mean scores on the ATD-ISE as a function of Employment status.

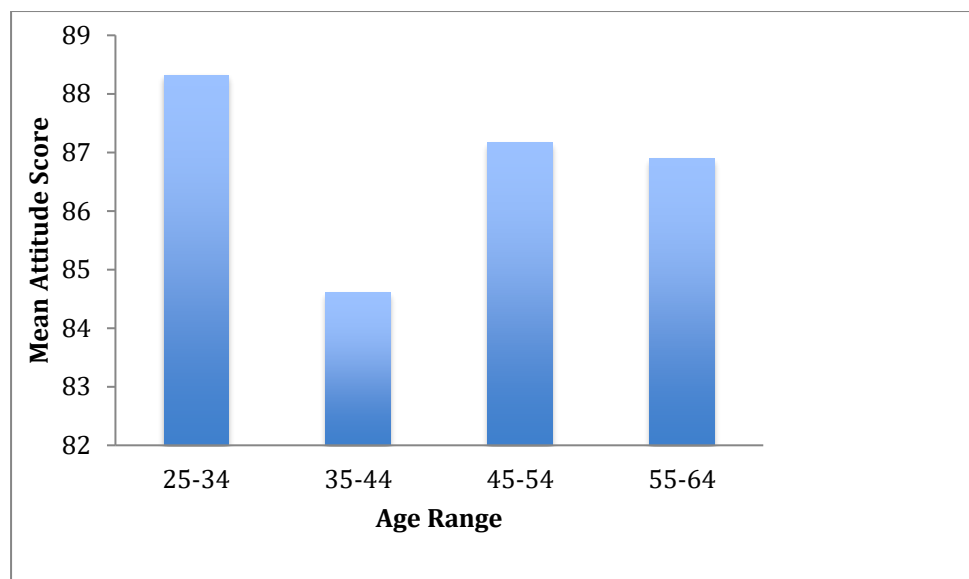


The means for the ATD-ISE by age (Figure 2) demonstrates that those in the younger categories (25-34) have a more positive attitude to digital technology use in prisons.

The 35-44 age group are less positive. Mature groups appear to be more p????

Figure 2: Mean scores on the ATD-ISE as a function of age range.

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The results of this survey are framed within four broad themes: which are?

### **Security and Surveillance**

Questions in relation to security, risk and cyber security identified a fear of reoffending as a result of digital access and use. 80% felt that victims might be contacted if people in prison could have an online experience, and 86% felt that this might help people in prison to continue criminal activities. Whilst these fears were felt by most of the sample surveyed, 87% had an expectation that emails would be censored; 94% agreed that they should be screened for sensitive information.

### **Compliance, Order & Reducing Reoffending**

Despite this strength in attitude when asked, respondents acknowledged the purposeful and rehabilitative benefits of digital use. Access to digital technology in prison is conceived by half (50%) of the respondents that this can help improve digital skills, make better use of time in prison, enhance learning opportunities as well as help finding and securing a job. The public was less convinced that digital technology can

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improve self- confidence (41%). There were an even smaller proportion of respondents who perceived a direct relationship between digital access and use and a reduction in reoffending (22%).

### **Privilege and Access**

The survey does highlight that there is initial 'nervousness' about inmates having access to digital technology. Over half (54%) of the survey respondents said in the first instance that they were against access. For example, they would want emails to be screened (73%). However, when pressed to respond to further questions, they acknowledged that access had to be earned (57%) - because the same number believed digital technology to be a luxury and should not be 'free' without cost and/or compliance. Conversely a lower proportion (42%) felt it was unreasonable that digital use is a luxury.

### **Enhancing Skills**

The results of the survey highlight that (41%) believe the use of technology could make people in prison time productive. Yet, 43% of the sample could not see that use of technology could enhance learning opportunities. Moreover, 38% disagreed that digital literacy would assist with employability on release.

### **Cost and Implementation**

Over half (52%) of the respondents agreed that people in prison should be charged to access and use a range of digital technologies whilst in prison. For those surveyed, 61% agreed that the taxpayer should not fund this kind of enterprise. However, 44% could see how technology might bring about efficiency savings and save them money. When asked, a few respondents envisaged the reduction of staffing in the advent of



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digitization of the prison. With this in mind, 53% expressed that prison services are not capable of introducing these services right now, and it will, according to 62%, create additional work. Just under half, 47%, believe that this should not be a priority.

### **Discussion**

The results of this survey highlight two noteworthy points for discussion. First the public's perception of the digital divide in the context of the penal landscape.

Second, how there is scope for informing public knowledge about prisons in the era of digitization.

### ***Digital Divide & Penal Divide***

Selwyn's (2003; 2004) analysis of the 'digital divide' is helpful in contextualizing the results of this survey. His typology of understanding digital opportunities usefully draws our attention to the nature and features of uneven access to ICT. Selwyn distinguishes the stages of the digital divide in terms of 'formal/theoretical access' and 'effective' access but also 'engagement' and 'outcomes and consequences' (2004: 352). This framework is, therefore, not just a matter of access it reflects 'the extent to which technology use enables individuals to participate and be part of society' (Selwyn 2004, 351). The process of imprisonment deliberately denies and regulates incarcerated's communicative opportunities, social interactions (including face-to-face interaction), and ability to make autonomous choices with respect to communication. As Knight (2016) suggests, prisons are communication-poor environments where access and engagement are strictly limited. In the case of the prison, the 'divide' is two-fold, exacerbated by the state's intervention in limiting communicative opportunities. Reisdorf and Rikard, (2018) have adapted Helsper's

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(2012) basic model of corresponding fields to develop a 'digital rehabilitation model.'

In this model, access and digital competency can help boost economic, social, personal, cultural and health dimensions in returning citizens. Evidence which challenges what some of the public surveyed in this study fail to observe.

How the public perceives this outcome and such models of digital rehabilitation has proved noteworthy in our study. It is evident that public attitudes to digital opportunities and enrichment are complex. The survey reported in this article aligns with Selwyn's (2004) stages of the digital divide. For our purposes, we have adapted Selwyn's typology to consider how people view the *distribution of ICT* in prisons, *use and uptake* and related *skills*.

First it is acknowledged that the *distribution of ICT* in the prison context should be without 'cost' to the taxpayer. Second, *access* should be 'privileged' and meet 'security' conditions. Third, the public perceives that *use and uptake* would benefit the running of the prison and help achieve 'compliance and order' as well as assist in meeting 'reducing reoffending' outcomes. Fourth, the acquisition of *skills* using digital technologies is also favourable, but the public, according to our UK survey, is less clear or even knowledgeable that these processes could contribute to wider rehabilitative outcomes and crime reduction. Thus demonstrating a lack of knowledge.

Like other public opinion surveys on imprisonment (see Roberts and Hough 2011) , rehabilitation is valued and considered a priority, but are less clear about the direct association between digital literacy/competency and the potential for rehabilitation. Even though respondents do make an association between the need to rehabilitate and digital access, this is within limits. The majority of the public want assurances that those in prison cannot freely access the full interactive features of

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the online world. Features of security and cost are considered vital for the majority of the participants.

### ***A question of framing***

One way of understanding these kinds of responses is to reflect on the manner in which digitization is framed in popular and policy discourses and set out in public agendas. Epstein et al (2011) highlight that the ways in which the digital divide is interpreted is based on the ways certain public agenda topics are 'framed'. What they suggest is the 'characterization of a public problem can often set the terms for how it will be perceived by policymakers, the press and the public...' (Epstien et al, 2011:94). On closer analysis of the digital divide, they identified that dominant discourses were framed around the notion that there is a 'problem of access' ( Epstein et al, 2011; 94). They found, then, that responses to this were typically rooted in technological determinism and that ICT access was considered essential for economic growth and social prosperity. Their own study highlighted that responsibility for eliminating the digital divide was perceived to be down to the individual citizen to achieve access and develop their own skills. They found that access was considered a luxury and therefore not essential for the state to intervene. This is pertinent this survey's findings regarding inmates' gaining access and acquiring digital skills whilst in prison. The ways in which the use and purpose of prison are communicated to the public certainly corroborate with the less eligibility agenda-- that people in prison do not deserve access to ICTs. Their loss and restriction of communicative opportunities purports to a discourse of deprivation. Jewkes (2012:451) suggests that these discourses recycled in popular culture 'leads

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to indifference'. In turn, Jewkes argues that populism and punitiveness can frame people in prison as 'living it up in prison holiday camps at the taxpayer's expense' (Jewkes, 2012 :455).

Our survey, then, highlights an important opportunity for prison policy makers and reformers. Whilst some of these sentiments and fears are reflected in the findings, this sample does not wholly uphold punitive views. The framing of some of our questions challenged those who responded to look beyond the deprivation model of imprisonment and consider the rehabilitative function in terms of skills and desistance. In addition, participants also hold their own views of digital technology more generally, and as Kvasny and Truex (2001:409) suggest, quite often technology is defined as 'polar opposites...growth/stagnation, new economy/old economy and progress/retreat'. One indicator may follow these principles of polarization in which our respondents were either techno-optimists techno-skeptics or, indifferent.

### ***Shifting Attitudes: The Undecided***

Polarization of opinion was evident in our survey across many of the items. However, a smaller percentage of individuals (approximately 25%) remained undecided and indifferent. This is denoted by the *neither agree nor disagree* category on the scale. This was identified in for example item 3 - *I feel that use of technology could reduce the potential for violence in prison* and also item 27 - *I think digital technologies will help save the taxpayer money*. This could be explained by the fact that those in the survey lacked knowledge upon which to base a clear opinion. The framing of the statements can suggest that those who answer do not know enough about the causal

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links between meaningful use of technology upon either prisoner behaviour or efficiency savings resulting from digitization, for those proposed by Reisdorf and Rikard (2018) for example. There is current evidence to support both these statements that digital technology can reduce violence and save money (McDougall et al, 2017). Naturally, this evidence has not been adopted or translated into popular discourses readily available to the general public. Many respondents expressed a fear that technology could create even more opportunities for people in prison to engage in additional criminal activities. However, this is in the absence of clearer information about what prison security protocols, measures, and solutions are available to prevent this from happening. Digital solutions that are currently available for our prisons are secure, and it is not possible for users to undertake deviant and illegal online activities (Knight and Van De Steene, 2017). However, this information is not widely understood by the general public. In England and Wales, research found that the supply and use of illicit mobile phones in prisons was complex and the demand was not just down to criminal activity (Ellison et al, 2018). The research found that regular and cost-effective access to telephones in order to maintain family and friendship contact was significant. Consensus between inmates and prison staff was divided. However research in the USA by Muffereh et al (2021) highlight that staff who also have access to technology are also keen for inmates to have access to it.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In repeating and extending this study, it would be valuable to also assess psychosocial factors like emotional orientation, prejudice, and fear (see Wood and Viki, 2001). In addition, identifying the views of the administration of punishment would be valuable

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in interrogating underlying attitudes towards digital provision to people in prison. We were also curious about respondents' own digital competency and the extent to which their own use would impact on their opinion. Further explorations might consider the basis of opinion as indicated by consumer choices, such as news intake, socio-economic status, and political opinion. There is a need to generate qualitative material that will provide more in-depth detail about attitude and explore how their opinions are expressed and felt. Moreover, in a post-Covid era, attitudes towards technology are evolving, seeing an increase and dependence on digital services to undertake everyday activities and access services- digital is normal.

Our prisons are at the beginning of a digital revolution, and there is inevitability that people in prison will be managing their daily lives using digital technology moving forward. The pace of digital maturity is increasing in a number of jurisdictions where people in prison can order their meals, book their visits, and make appointments to access services in and out of the prison (Knight, 2015) Crime education initiatives are useful, and the outcome of this study is valuable in this respect. Allen (2013) recommends that opportunities to inform are important for policy development. With a supportive and informed public, policy makers are more likely to respond positively. Whilst the public remains in many respects uninformed, policy makers too can appear indifferent and linger in the hinterland of indecision, which can lead to inaction.

Public engagement activities that are evidence-based can help to 'inform, influence, and involve' (Allen, 2013 65). Influencing opinion can help shape feelings and thinking, and so prison services can work directly with the public to undertake these kinds of activities. In the context of digitization of our prisons, it is also valuable to take into account social, political, and economic landscape. Attitudes towards

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prisoners' getting access to digital technologies is shaped by the zeitgeist in which they are positioned. Currently austerity measures are impacting directly on our public services and so the public themselves experience austere measures. This would certainly inflame perhaps punitive attitudes towards our prisoners. In contrast public discourses are favouring health recovery in light of the pandemic. Furthermore, there is an increased awareness of digital literacy and the benefits it has in basic life skills, as explained;

*Digital literacy programs give returning citizens the tools to break vicious, intergenerational cycles that disproportionately affect low-income families and communities of color. Returning citizens can become positive change agents for their own communities, promoting upward mobility through technology. (Arguelles & Ortiz-Lui, 2021, 17)*

These kinds of messages require public dissemination in order to increase nuanced understandings of prison life and its impact on returning citizens. Scholars and researchers have a role to play in this enterprise and through partnerships with government and non-government agencies campaigns can be launched using a variety of platforms, such as social media. Recording and measuring change particularly around social issues is challenging and surveys like the one presented in this article have a role to play in assessing levels (including depth) of awareness on complex topics.

In light of digital progress, there is also the danger that this direction of travel for our prisons becomes a form of 'decorative justice'(Cheliotis 2014)- masking the punitive features of incarceration whilst ramping up tighter and harder modes of surveillance and control using technologically produced big data and artificial



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intelligence for example. In this sense penal reform and rehabilitative transformation becomes restricted.

With respect to achieving digital inclusion and digitally-literate returning citizens, there is some need to convey evidence to the public in order for them to make informed decisions about their prisons. At the same time it is necessary to acknowledge, too, the public's attitude towards technology use. Selwyn (2003) reminds us that technology access can often be misjudged and that popular discourses purport to technological determinism which conveys a view that technology benefits all. Balancing these views with evidence is therefore important. Equally, technology in the context of prisons offers a curious dilemma for citizens. Whilst advocating punishment, most people would agree that prison should be useful and productive and lead towards a path of desistance from crime. Yet, powerful ethical and moral concepts can disrupt this line of thinking and concepts of technology use can evoke fear and trepidation. Moreover, the digitization of our prisons following a technological determinist position will maintain and uphold the punitive dimensions of imprisonment by enhancing increased surveillance and control (Van De Steene and Knight, 2017). There are important moral and ethical dimensions where people in prison will ultimately be forced to use technology to exist in prison. On such mechanism to widen impact and understanding of this could be achieved by drawing on co-production methodologies. Here development and implementation of penal services and interventions adopt a needs-based strategy whereby stakeholders, including the wider public are in active and regular consultation with policy makers, developers and service providers (Van De Steene and Knight, 2017).

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Our final recommendation then would be to consider how a digital strategy model for prisons is developed with consultation with stakeholders and is grounded in their specific digital literacy values. The challenge, therefore, is to help stakeholders understand how digital literacy could contribute to desistance and what it means for serving prisoners. Communicating and informing stakeholders, particularly the public, is a complex undertaking. Framing digital literacy in the context of imprisonment and more broadly justice requires more evidence base in order to shed light on this issue. Whilst the evidence base remains small, services, policy makers and the third sector could benefit from adopting digital literacy models to communicate how digital competency could be nurtured for people in prison. Reisdorf and Rikard's (2018) digital rehabilitation model is helpful as it translates core fields such as economic, cultural, social and personal into the context of imprisonment and reentry. In further refinement we would also recommend that conveying these potential benefits into competencies.

Finally, a resource commissioned by the European Commission offers a digital competence framework (Carretero et al, 2017, ) for citizens, outlining eight levels of competencies from basic to highly specialized. This model is effective in conveying what level of skills are required. Using the analogy of learning to swim, DigComp assesses digital tasks in relation to complexity of tasks, autonomy, and cognitive domains. So, when we envision prisoners' access and use of technology, it is possible to rationalize what the minimum standards would be necessary in order for them to thrive in the digital world. Whilst we would not advocate that people in prison are prevented from developing highly specialized skills, we would want it to be conveyed, as Reisdorf and Rikard (2018) do, that people in prison are presented with

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opportunities to thrive upon their return to the community. Exploring digital literacy in the prison context is therefore necessary to provide the public with the value (as well as challenges) in order for them to make informed opinions about their prisons.

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