



# Quarterly Newsletter

How developing  
softer skills  
supports  
rehabilitation

The impact of  
lived experience  
staff at CFO  
Activity Hubs

Updates on  
awards, women's  
services and  
more

# Contents

Summer is here and so is the CFO Quarterly Newsletter!

This quarter we have been looking at how different skills can benefit a participant on their rehabilitation journey and how lived experience helps drive success for participants.

There's also update around women's services, veterans, neurodiverse participants and more.

If you want to learn more about CFO delivery, have questions about the materials in this newsletter or want to make a referral, please visit our website:  
**[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk](https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk)**

**Page 3** – Award Winning CFO

**Page 4 to 6** – The Value of Lived Experience

**Page 7 to 10** – Developing Softer Skills

**Page 11** – Sustainable Office

**Page 12** – Women's Support

**Page 13** – Neurodiversity Peer Support

**Page 14** – Custody Bites

**Page 15** – Community Bites

**Page 16** – Make a Referral







# Award Winning CFO!

CFO won the Efficiency & Value for Money Award at the latest MoJ Awards!

Evidence showed the CFO programme helped cut reoffending among male participants by 8 percentage points and increased employment rates by 2 percentage points over the national average for prison leavers. For every £1 invested, CFO returns £3.84 in benefits!

In combining the previous CFO3 and CFO Activity Hubs programmes into a single model, CFO Evolution has cut costs by 17% compared to previous contracts.

Lord Timpson, Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, said nominees: *"Help to uphold the principles that underpin our democracy, even through times of unprecedented challenge and scrutiny. And it makes a real difference to the lives of people in our country, every day."*

# The Value of Lived Experience

**Lived experience is defined as:**  
**“personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.”**

For HMPPS, it includes people in prison and on probation and our lived experience workforce.

CFO Activity Hubs in the North East (provided by Ingeus) have lived experience representation amongst their staff, and lived experience staff are present at many CFO locations.

Site Host/Community Guide, Helen, has been using her lived experience to support participants along their rehabilitation journey.

Having initially been referred to CFO by her Probation Officer, Helen is working hard with women in the region, helping to reduce reoffence as part of the CFO Evolution programme.

James too, is an Activity Facilitator at the North East CFO Activity Hubs. He progressed through the CFO programme himself and has since transitioned into employment – his lived experience allows him to connect with participants, supporting them to make progress within the community.

We were fortunate enough to sit down with both Helen and James about their roles at the CFO Activity Hubs, and talk about they are able to best utilise their lived experience to reduce reoffending.



---

**How does your lived experience help you interact with participants in a way which somebody without lived experience may not?**

**Helen:** *"As soon as I say that I was on Probation I can see they understand that anyone can cross that line. The questions will start then and they've got that interest because I can relate to them – I know exactly how they are feeling. A good example would be a woman I picked up from custody after her release and now I keep seeing her on a Monday for ladies' day at the Hub. She's doing well, she's put down the drink and we have that connection and understanding."*



**James:** *"You've got the obvious thing which is rapport building. They can identify that you've got a shared experience because you've been in their position. I can say that I've sat exactly where they are sitting, saying exactly what they're saying and I understand what's actually going on. You've got first-hand experience and fundamentally understand why participants react the way they do. It gives us that bit more empathy and it's a useful skill that I couldn't really be trained to have."*

*"By sharing my experience, participants can understand there is a way out. It's easy when you're struggling to just say I can't do this, but when you have a living example in front of you it's hard for someone to argue. I was homeless and now I'm well; I've got a family, I've got a wife, kids and a sustained job. I'm actually an example to them to understand what is possible."*

**Helen continued:** *"If you've got someone with lived experience, you've got that instant connection. Everybody deserves a chance, everyone deserves to be rebuilt and start again. The Hub changed my life, so what's it going to do for someone else!"*

---

**What is something unique that your lived experience brings?**

**James:** *"I think it's just that fundamental understanding of the participant journey because you've literally walked the same road as them. That's something you can't train for, or learn – you can on a surface level but to actually live and understand it is a different ball game."*

**Do you have a good news story, or someone you have worked with that sticks out as a positive?**

**Helen:** *"One of our participants I met, we've really travelled along the same line and she says that if it wasn't for me being here she wouldn't have the confidence to progress into what she's doing – and she's now going to be starting work with us too! We just had that instant connection and I knew that the Hub would change her life, I just knew it. We bounce off each other and it's been an absolute joy working with her. If you can go home and know you've helped one person, that's why I'm so passionate about it."*

**Can you tell me about your favourite part about your role?**

**James:** *"Seeing the difference with someone when they come in and they're shy and don't really know how to do things on their own, then down the line they're confident in going to even external groups and applying for jobs on their own. When someone is finishing their Probation Order and you just know you're not going to see them again, that's when you realise you've had a long term, profound effect on someone's life – that's probably the best part about it."*

**Helen:** *"My favourite part is actually talking about participants about my lived experience. It's being able to share it. I've been helped and I now want to help someone else and it's just seeing their face, that lightbulb moment – that's what I love about it."*





# Developing Softer Skills



Softer skills are a key element of the CFO Evolution model, being an important factor in supporting participants along their rehabilitation journey. Examples of these skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving and creativity.

Particular progress can be seen in the social and emotional aspects of learning that contribute to participants reintegrating into local societies, becoming work ready and ultimately, reducing reoffence.

Bill Spiby is the **HMPPS CFO Commissioning Lead** and played a key role in designing the CFO Evolution programme. We sat down with Bill to talk about the impact and success of enhancing participants' softer skills.

*"Developing softer skills is about getting participants to a point where they can progress into the mainstream on their own" said Bill.*

*"It's a confidence thing for participants to believe in themselves. There's value in developing skills that is really motivational for them. It's achievable and they're getting benefit from it. The ability to be organised, and get up on time, to stay on track – these softer interpersonal skills are really important."*

Skills such as these move participants closer to the labour market, however, they can have multiple benefits.



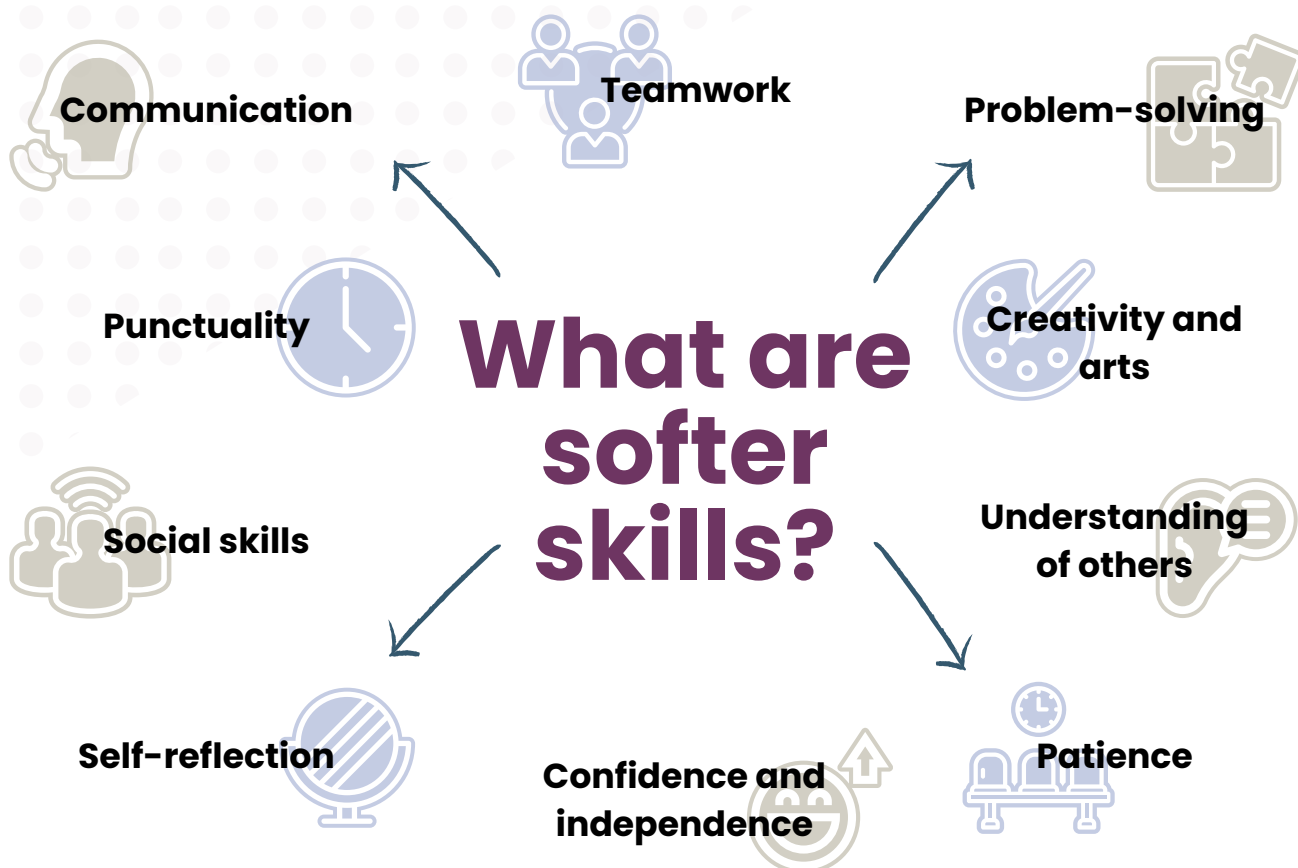


*"Beyond the world of work the softer skills are crucial for your own interaction. If you have those communication skills, you're much more organised. You can navigate the bureaucracy, understand daily processes, move online etc."*

*"Having poor interactions can negatively impact on an individual, cause frustrations and lead to further offending, so by having these skills you're much better equipped to navigate daily life"* continued Bill, showcasing how softer skills can have impact when it comes to reducing reoffending.

Softer skill development is built into the model for CFO Evolution, being present throughout a participants' journey – particularly when accessing a CFO Wing in custody, or CFO Activity Hub in the community. Speaking about this Bill said: *"There's lot of structured leisure activities and there's lots of bite-sized things that participants can dip into and slowly develop their softer skills, almost without even realising they are. There's little vehicles in place for developing people skills, organisation, teamwork and more. All of that stuff is built into the model."*

*"Most activities come from the research. Particularly in the Hub and Wing model we broke down activities into categories that you could build upon – teamwork was a particular one, but you also have moral, ethical and citizenship skills too"* he added.



Please note, softer skills are not limited to the above.



The impact of strong softer skills can be seen both in the reduction of reoffending, and within the participants themselves. Graduation events at CFO Wings and the feedback from participants are testament to this.

Bill concluded: *"Something might just seem like a simple arts project, but for participants it can be a great deal of achievement. There's worth in all these things, and it's an important thing for participants' development. You can see real palpable excitement from participants about how far they have come."*



*"Often when working with those furthest away from the mainstream, you have to take smaller steps and use softer skills, use things that are achievable. Participants can work towards these goals and they slowly build up, helping to make positive change."*

If you have participants in your care who would benefit from developing their softer skills – whether to improve their employability prospects, navigate day-to-day life with more ease or beyond – you can make a referral by going to: **[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/CFO-Evolution-Referrals](https://CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/CFO-Evolution-Referrals)** and completing the referral form. You can also scan the QR code here to make a referral!





# Skills and arts

Softer skills extend to activities such as arts and crafts, which promote teamwork, communication skills and more.

Recently, the Wolverhampton CFO Activity Hub was visited by Fiona Curran, **Chief Executive of Koestler Arts**. Koestler Arts is the UK's best known and oldest prison arts charity. They aim to inspire those with experience of the Criminal Justice System to take part in the arts, through the annual Koestler Awards programme. Fiona said: *"Different people get different things out of the arts. People tell us they have sat down in an education setting to do art, and felt comfortable for the first time, almost without even realising they're learning in education."*

She also touched on how arts can inspire success, allowing participants to take steps to overcoming personal barriers through creativity. She said: *"Creative activities can be a pathway into all different things such as education, wellbeing, working as a team, self-critique, understanding yourself, looking at your past and at your own stories. We've also seen the arts used in the really simple way of getting a first qualification or a first skill. People might feel more comfortable working on their CV or taking a basic English class through arts, and the arts can definitely lead to tangible skills and qualifications."*

Arts, crafts and creative activities can therefore mean much more to participants than the physical activities themselves. Fiona continued on this, and said: *"I find that the soft skills are really misnamed because they're actually some of the hardest stuff. If you can't look at yourself and make those changes, then you're not going to do the next thing like engaging with your family, with education, with housing and managing to stay out of the pattern of offending."*

It was Fiona's first visit to a CFO Activity Hub. Concluding on her experience, she said: *"It all makes so much sense. I'm convinced about the power of engaging with people and creativity, and I can see you've got a bright, lively atmosphere that sees people as individuals and finds something tailored to them!"*

If you are supporting people who would benefit from encouragement to access the benefits of the arts, find out more about year-round activities, the annual awards, exhibitions and mentoring at [KoestlerArts.org.uk](https://www.koestlerarts.org.uk)



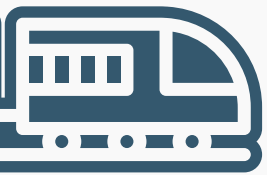


# Sustainable Office

Within the last year, CFO staff travelled

**18,222**

miles using rail services.



As part of our sustainability policy, CFO (and CFO Providers) are committed to reducing waste, energy consumption and promoting recycling. We also have a commitment to explore ways of minimising private transport usage and promote the use of public transport across our providers. Here are just some of the highlights of our latest update.

By travelling this distance, CFO staff used **1.04** tonnes of carbon – had this distance been covered by an average car, the result would have been **4.42** tonnes of carbon.

Therefore, **CFO staff saved 3.38 tonnes of carbon by travelling via train!**

## Procurement

All furnishings purchased for CFO Evolution Wings contain recycled content (up to 55%) and purchased ranges are **99% recyclable!**

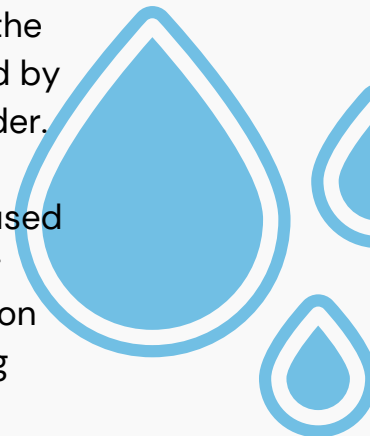
Stationery is all purchased from a company with **ethically sourced materials** and reduced packaging for their products.

Printed materials purchased by CFO are **recyclable**, and continue to be obtained by the HMPPS prison supply chain where feasible, or via a local supplier, reducing delivery mileage.

CFO launched a new SharePoint site, which includes sustainability and encourages use of Teams for meetings. It also includes information about using public transport, pool car usage and shared travelling. When attending large events (such as HMPPS Away Days) staff are encouraged to travel via train, or pool together if travelling by car is required.

Water coolers within the CFO office are supplied by a **carbon neutral** provider.

A water heater is also used rather than wasting electricity and water on consistently heating kettles.



To read our sustainability update in full please visit:

**[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/Sustainability-Update-Summer-2025](https://CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/Sustainability-Update-Summer-2025)**

# Women's Support

## Keeping in touch

The Hamlet at HMP Drake Hall is a CFO wing which supports women with their rehabilitation journey. Following contact being made by former participant a 'keeping in touch' mailbox was established to allow those who have moved beyond The Hamlet to let CFO staff and their peers know how they are progressing within the community.

Recently they got an update from Libby\* who said: *"Probation is doing my risk review next month and said if I carry on like I am they are going to reduce me to medium risk. They are really happy with my progress and said the way I have applied myself to my university course is nothing but commendable. I have proven that people can have a blip and still change. Probation have given me the green light to relocate for full-time university in September. I am going to be doing an LLB in Law and Criminology."*

The Custodial Manager at The Hamlet read the full update from Libby\* to the women at a CFO Celebration Event. The group were thrilled to hear that one of their peers was making such a success of themselves in the community!



## Bags of joy

Support Workers at the Nottingham CFO Activity Hub have been working with brands such as Lush and Beauty Bank to create takeaway bags for female participants. The donated items have been distributed to women at the Hub, helping to encourage engagement with women-only sessions.

# Neurodiversity Peer Support

The CFO programme is structured in two phases. Phase 1 involves an intensive eight-week classroom programme, while Phase 2 focuses on giving back to the community. In Phase 2 participants can contribute to both the prison community and the wider local area. A key goal here is to create meaningful and impactful projects.

CFO Officers and participants at The Willow Wing at HMP Mount have proudly achieved the overarching aim of Phase 2. They successfully conducted their first of many outreaches into the community.

The men engaging in Phase 2 created fidget toys to support neurodiverse individuals.

Within HMP The Mount, these toys were given to the neurodiversity wing to support their peers, and staff have even taken some home to support their own families with neurodifferences.

In the wider community, the fidget toys were donated to a local school who specialise in neurodiversity. The school welcomed CFO's involvement and staff were thrilled with the items provided. Staff praised the craftsmanship, and commitment displayed by the participants residing at The Willow.

This achievement shows the work and dedication of the participants engaging with CFO, and their want to support neurodiverse individuals in custody and the community. This marked the first of many impactful engagements from CFO participants at HMP The Mount, and similar activities have taken place at other CFO Wings.







# Custody Bites

CFO Evolution delivery is available in over 90 prison estates, here are just some of the highlights from custody.

**Lord Chancellor**, Shabana Mahmood, visited HMP Moorland. As part of her visit, she visited the CFO Lighthouse Wing to ask some of the Phase 1 participants about their CFO experience and how it differed to elsewhere they had been. She also visited the CFO Phase 2 workshop and participants spoke about their efforts in upcycling furniture to sell to donate to a local housing charity. They talked with such passion about how they have learnt new skills and have been able to see the change they are making in the wider prison community.



The CLU at HMP High Down was lucky enough to host an array of exotic pets for the participants to meet, including snakes, lizards and a tortoise. One participant shared that it was the best day he has had since coming into custody!

Several other activities have been taking place across the CFO Evolution programme in custody, including creating a band at HMP Featherstone, neurodiversity stitching at HMP Drake Hall, mural painting at HMP Portland and much more.

For more information on CFO Wing delivery, please visit: [CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/Custody-Delivery](https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/Custody-Delivery).





# Community Bites

CFO community delivery is available through CFO Activity Hubs and wider community delivery in all regions; here are just some of the highlights from the community.

Participants in the South West have been painting new wall murals at the CFO Activity Hubs to brighten up the space and make it welcoming for their future peers. Some participants in have also been starting their peer mentoring journey, engaging in a course at the Bristol CFO Activity Hub.



Meanwhile, the London CFO Activity Hubs have been hosting rotating monthly job fairs in Croydon, Lewisham and Lambeth. These fairs help participants to explore employment options and move close to the labour market.

There is an array of activities available for participants to engage with in the community, including independent living skills, financial support, group sessions and much more.

To learn more about CFO delivery in the community, or see what is available in your region, please visit:

[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/Community-Delivery](https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/Community-Delivery)



# Make a Referral

Referrals can be made to CFO Evolution via:

**[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/CFO-Evolution-Referrals](https://CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk/CFO-Evolution-Referrals)**

or by scanning the QR code!



**[CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk](https://CreatingFutureOpportunities.gov.uk)**

\*Names changed throughout to avoid disclosure of identity