

“I Volunteer!” Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of New Zealand Community Prison Volunteers.

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Abstract

The Prison system increasingly relies on community-based volunteers to deliver a diverse array of rehabilitative services and programs to inmates. Community-based volunteers constitute a unique role within our prison systems with their work often going unacknowledged by the public who have little access to the prison environment. There is a lack of research focusing on the volunteers' experiences and the realities of their work. Existing research is predominantly centred around American faith-based volunteer organisations, with minimal attention given to New Zealand-based volunteers. This project aims to address these gaps by investigating the question: What are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experiences, and the benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within a New Zealand setting? Qualitative interviews were conducted with six individuals who have worked in various volunteer capacities within New Zealand prisons. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed the conflicting dynamics and tensions between the neoliberalist bureaucratic prison culture and the more flexible and holistic worldviews of the volunteers. The study suggests that the volunteers' capacity to function beyond the ridged risk-averse structure of the prison underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work. However, the volunteers' independence also creates a clashing of cultures, resulting in tensions and challenges as the volunteers navigated their roles within a total institution.

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Chapter One: Introduction

As an undergraduate psychology and criminology student at the University of Otago, I had the opportunity to volunteer in a New Zealand prison. This volunteering role involved working with fellow students to facilitate a creative writing class for the inmates. During this program, inmates participated in workshops for poetry writing, formal letter writing, fiction writing, and more. My volunteering experience left a lasting deeply positive impression on me. The inmates' raw emotions and passionate expressions within the writing they shared with the class touched me deeply. However, we also experienced many frustrations and faced numerous challenges while trying to provide the best program we could while navigating the complex and intimidating prison environment for the first time. During my time as a volunteer, I saw huge value in community-led voluntary prison initiatives, and the seed was planted to conduct research in this area. I knew I wanted to focus on volunteer-led prison programs, not only to understand more myself but also to uncover their experiences for the public, who often have restricted access to the prison environment. It was from this general curiosity that I came to my research question: what are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experiences, and the benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within a New Zealand setting?

Correctional and Volunteer Partnerships- The Rehabilitative Ideal to the Era of Neoliberalism:

Partnerships between community volunteers and prison facilities have shared a lengthy and complex historical timeline as the period of the rehabilitative ideal, and the eventual rise of neoliberalism continually changed the dynamics between volunteers and correctional institutions. From the 19th century, partnerships between the government and volunteers emerged, leading to a rise of new volunteer organisations from the 1880s, which were primarily religiously affiliated (Tennant, 2004). During the early post-war period, volunteer organisations in New Zealand enjoyed a close working partnership with the correctional system and received favourable access to state resources and support (Just Speak, 2014). The collaboration between volunteers and Corrections was situated within a wider cultural justice movement throughout the 50s and 60s known as the "rehabilitative ideal" (Cullen, 2013). The rehabilitative ideal prioritised the reform and reintegration of inmates, signalling a shift away from a previous emphasis on punitive punishment (Cullen, 2013; Sundt et al., 1998). The rehabilitative ideal led to a fruitful relationship between these two entities as they collectively worked towards the goal of reforming the incarcerated (Just Speak, 2014). However,

from the 1980s, neoliberalist ideology, which is characterised by an emphasis on individual responsibility and punitive and tough-on-crime rhetoric, emerged in New Zealand (Abrams et al., 2016).

Neoliberalism emerged and spread amongst Western nations from the 1980s and transformed the nature of penal policy as well as the prison context. Neoliberalism is a political ideology and is briefly described as the installation of competitive markets in all areas of life, but more specifically posits that the economic market is the most efficient institution for maintaining social control (Birch, 2015, pp. 572). Neoliberalism ushered in the implementation of market-based approaches in the penal sector (Tennant, 2004; O'Malley, 2016; Crewe et al., 2015), which is associated with the rise of the privatisation of prisons and the increasing adoption of bureaucratic regulation and management practises to allow prisons to become an efficient and legitimate institution (Armstrong, 2003; Pratt & Clark, 2005; Tennant, 2004; O'Malley, 2016). As a result, prisons employ target-driven and market approaches where prison staff face increasing pressures to meet performance targets whilst facing increasing workloads, staff casualisation, and, high turnover (Crewe et al., 2015; Liebling & Arnold, 2012).

Neoliberalist policy ushered in a “culture of control” where an increasing “punitive turn” focused on greater use of imprisonment and harsher sentencing as an attempt to respond to crime (O'Malley, 2016, pp. 2; Garland, 2004). Simultaneous with the increasing punitive response and approach to criminal justice, neoliberalism was marked by the reduction of welfare provisions and the diminishing use of “therapeutic sanctions” which were thought to detract from ideas of individual responsibility and were argued to be ineffective in rehabilitating inmates (O'Malley, 2016, pp.2; Cullen, 2013; Duwe, 2016). Consequently, correctional budgets for prison programs and inmate services became strained, as funding was prioritised towards primary crime prevention and control measures such as policing (Dewey et al., 2021). This punitive turn also affected prisoner-staff relations which became increasingly strained during the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Prisoner-staff relations became forged in “neo-paternalism,” which was characterised by the increasing use of authoritarian and ‘soft power’ which is more in-direct power asserted through stringent rules and policies (Crewe, 2011, pp. 456). The hostile culture that can exist between inmates and correctional staff, driven by punitive and neo-paternalistic approaches, is further exacerbated by the increasing pressures faced by staff outlined earlier (Just Speak, 2014; Crewe et al., 2015). Amidst this penal context, into the 21st century, correctional departments are now increasingly relying on community

volunteers to supplement their work, and aid in the delivery of various services and programs for inmates (Department of Corrections, 2021; Gilmour & Alessi, 2022; Loughnan, 2022).

The Current Study:

This research is an exploratory pilot study, where I conducted semi-structured interviews with six prison volunteer workers to examine the research questions: What are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experience and the benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within a New Zealand setting? This research aims to provide better insight into the lived experiences of community prison volunteers, specifically around their experiences as they fulfilled their role within the prison environment, the perceived benefits their work brought to both them and the inmates, as well as the challenges and barriers they faced. The methodology informing my dissertation is Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Through my analysis, the conflicting dynamics and tensions between the neoliberalist bureaucratic prison culture and the flexible and holistic worldviews of the volunteers were revealed. I argue that the volunteers' capacity to function beyond the ridged risk-averse structure of the prison, underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work. However, the volunteers' independence also creates a clashing of cultures, resulting in tensions and challenges as the volunteer navigated their roles within a total institution. As this study takes on an exploratory pilot study format, this research leaves room for potential future research to expand on the findings. Although this smaller-scale case study focuses on a small number of New Zealand volunteers, literature supports that smaller qualitative studies can still explore and produce in-depth accounts and opinions of participants (Crouch & Mckenzie, 2006).

The findings of this study can not only inform the public and relevant institutions (corrections, governments, and volunteer agencies) about volunteers, their challenges, and perhaps limitations, as well as what benefits they bring to the prison system. These findings can also be used by volunteers themselves, to feel a sense of community, as they relate to the experiences of volunteers documented here, and see their work being validated and appreciated. Research in this area has been dominated by analyses of primarily religious volunteers within a Southern American prison context (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Therefore, this research contributes to the development of further explorations of community prison volunteerism within the context of New Zealand.

Chapter Overview:

Chapter One-Introduction: I first outlined my positionality as a previous volunteer and discussed how it led to my research interest. I explored the impacts of neoliberal restructurings on the penal environment. The modern prison environment was examined to provide context for the experiences of the participants in this study. I also briefly explained the current study, its methodology, and general findings.

Chapter Two- Literature Review: I examine past research and literature on prison volunteerism, primarily studies involving religious volunteers in Southern American prisons (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). Such research discusses the profiles, motivations, and roles of prison volunteers, as well as the reciprocal benefits for both volunteers and inmates. Mental health benefits for inmates and the development of social capital through volunteer visitations are explored (Schuhmann et al., 2018; Dewey et al., 2021). The review also highlights the personal benefits for volunteers, such as fulfilment and transformed beliefs about inmates, and the justice system. Challenges faced by prison volunteers, including working within a total institution, and interpersonal challenges with inmates and staff are outlined. I end by briefly outlining the scope of New Zealand-based prison volunteerism research.

Chapter Three: Methodology: This chapter presents the methodology used in this research. Justification is provided for employing a qualitative research design. I discuss my use of semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Theoretical assumptions that guided the research are discussed, followed by an explanation of the research procedure, participant recruitment, interview and transcription process, and analysis phase. Lastly, the ethical considerations, such as informed consent and participant confidentiality, are outlined.

Chapter Four-Volunteer Experience: This first analysis chapter describes the participant's backgrounds, motivations, and experiences in the prison environment. The volunteer's involvement in prison volunteer primarily occurred through their university courses or their existing associations with non-profit organisations. Motivations encompassed altruistic desires and restorative motivations, which were explored using the Functional Approach Model (Clary et al., 1998) and the findings research exploring the motivations of volunteers working with sex offenders (Lowe et al., 2019) to conceptualise the participants' diverse motivations. Initial interactions with the prison

environment were confrontational and anxiety-provoking, revealing tensions between the contrasting worldviews of the volunteers and the nature of the prison environment.

Chapter Five-Benefits: This analysis chapter explores the perceived benefits of prison volunteering for both volunteers and inmates. Career-based benefits and experiential learning processes are identified. The theory of Transformative Learning is used to understand the volunteers' transformative experiences (Kitchenham, 2008). Mental health, well-being, and educational benefits are perceived for the inmates. The chapter highlights the use of critical and dialogic pedagogies by volunteers, creating equitable and trusting classroom spaces (Freire, 2000; McInerney, 2009; Little & Warr, 2022). The independence of volunteers allows them to function beyond the ridged structures of the prison which underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work.

Chapter Six-Challenges: This final analysis chapter examines the challenges faced by volunteers, including complex interpersonal dynamics with staff and inmates, as well as institutional administrative challenges imposed by the prison system. The clash of cultures between the volunteers and prison staff is further explored. The chapter argues that although being independent of the prison system provides many benefits, it also creates significant barriers and challenges due to the entrenched differences between these two entities.

Chapter Seven- Conclusion: Here I summarise the analysis chapters which address my research question: What are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experiences, and the benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within a New Zealand setting? This dissertation identifies and analyses the collision of two fundamentally different conceptual spaces, the community volunteers, and the prison system. I revisit my arguments that the volunteers' capacity to function beyond the ridged risk-averse structure of the prison, underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work. However, the volunteers' independence also creates a clashing of cultures, resulting in tensions and challenges as the volunteer navigated their roles within a total institution. I also provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Research has been interested in examining prison volunteer workers who are increasingly relied upon by correctional institutions to supplement and aid in the delivery of in-prison services and programs (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). However, research on prison volunteerism is dominated by accounts of religious volunteers working in Southern American prisons, with little being done within a New Zealand context (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). In this literature review, I first outline what research has been done on exploring the experiences of prison volunteers, primarily drawing from research within an American context. I first explore contemporary prison volunteer work, which sought to evaluate the profiles, motivations, and primary roles of religious prison volunteers (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). The literature review then moves to explore the body of literature which discusses the beneficial impacts of volunteering efforts in a penal context. I then focus on outlining literature that analyses the challenges faced by prison volunteers, at both the systemic level (barriers imposed by the prison system itself) and the interpersonal level (challenges with navigating relationships with staff and inmates). Lastly, I outline the key studies that have been conducted within a New Zealand context, as well as identifying the current gap in research, that this project seeks to address.

What Do We Know? Contemporary Prison Volunteerism:

Profile and motivations

Tewksbury and Dabney (2004) conducted one of the first qualitative studies which systematically profiled prison volunteers, surveying around 72 volunteers within a Southern American medium to a high-security prison. Most of their participants were higher educated, Caucasian males, who provided religious programs for the inmates (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). The self-report data gathered also identified that most of the volunteers were not actively recruited by their organisations or the prison, but rather chose to volunteer mostly driven by altruistic desires (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). Kort-Butler and Malone (2015), conducted a more recent study, investigating the role of citizen volunteers working within a midwestern American prison. Kort-Butler and Malone's (2015) research found similar findings, where prison volunteers tended to be white-middle-aged individuals, who were motivated to work with inmates through their altruistic desires to give back to their communities. Additionally, volunteering literature recognises that volunteering is complex and encompasses a wide range of multifaceted motivations (Kelemen et al., 2017). The Functional Approach Model has been used within volunteering literature to understand the different ways

people are motivated to engage in volunteer work (Clary et al., 1998; Souza & Dhami, 2008). Within this approach, there are six proposed motives behind people choosing to engage in volunteer work which includes, values, understanding, career, social, protective, and enhancement (Souza & Dhami, 2008; Clary et al., 1998). The *values function* involves altruistic motives and a desire to help others (Souza & Dhami, 2008). The *understanding function* encompasses the motivation to learn new skills which relates to the *career function* where individuals are interested in gaining career-based experience and skills. The *social function* pertains to an individual's desire to create new social relationships and networks (Souza & Dhami 2008). The *protective function* is driven by self-interest and aims to avoid personal guilt associated with being more fortunate than others (Souza & Dhami, 2008). Finally, the *enhancement function* encompasses motivations for personal growth and development through volunteer work (Souza & Dhami, 2008). More specifically for volunteering within a prison context, Lowe et al., (2019) conducted research on prison volunteers working with past convicted sex offenders and identified restorative motivations among them. Restorative motivations involve a desire to reduce reoffending, shift away from punitive approaches, and rather embrace community-based justice principles (Lowe et al., 2019). The Functional Approach Model (Clary et al., 1998) and the restorative motivations outlined in Lowe et al., (2019) provide frameworks for which I will understand and conceptualise the motivations of the participants in the current study.

The role of the prison volunteer

As discussed in the introduction, volunteers have been working within the prison sector since the 18th century and were primarily religious volunteers offering religious-based services to inmates (Chui & Cheng, 2013). While religious volunteer groups are a still significant presence within American prisons (Chui & Cheng, 2013), there is a significant research gap concerning non-religious volunteers, despite recent arguments in the literature that indicate that the role of prison volunteers has expanded considerably beyond faith-based endeavours (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Schuhmann et al., 2018; Gilmour & Alessi, 2022; Abrams et al., 2016; Sinclair, 2017). Volunteers deliver a wide range of non-religious programs, often focusing on five main areas: educational, vocational, life skills, preparation for re-entry, and psychological well-being services and programs to supplement those programs offered by Corrections (Dewey et al., 2021; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Furthermore, volunteers provide important positive connections with the communities and can aid inmates in accessing post-release services and support networks to ensure they are prepared upon their release (Sinclair, 2017; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Dewey et

al., 2021). Qualitative research has also sought to understand how volunteers perceive their roles within the prison environment (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). A recurring theme in such studies is that volunteers see themselves as “agents for change,” recognising the rehabilitative function of their role as they provide prisoners with opportunities for positive change in the face of otherwise limited rehabilitative opportunities (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004, pp. 178; Abrams et al., 2016).

In summary, while there is a dearth of past research examining prison volunteerism, some qualitative research has explored and sought to understand who engages in prison volunteerism and why. (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). Additional research has recognised the multifaceted nature of volunteer work and the varying motivations which drive people to engage in volunteer work (Souza & Dhimi, 2008; Clary et al., 1998; Lowe et al., 2019). Such research, even though not specific to a New Zealand context, provides some understanding as to the potential profiles of volunteers and provides an understanding of what draws people to such endeavours. The following section will move to explore literature that has addressed the potential benefits of volunteer work and challenges faced by volunteers which relates to this research’s aim in exploring the volunteers’ perceived benefits and challenges of their work.

What Are the Benefits of Prison Volunteerism:

As volunteers became increasingly relied upon and recognised within the penal environment, research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of their programs and services (Dewey et al., 2018). During the 20th century, as outlined earlier, issues and debates surrounding the rehabilitative ideal constituted a ‘what works?’ debate which has seen a struggle between proponents of punishment and rehabilitation (Cullen, 2013). As rehabilitation within a prison context became heavily criticised, actuarial justice rhetoric emerged, requiring correctional-based programs to be evidence-based to gain support and funding (Cullen, 2013; Dewey et al., 2018; O’Malley, 2000). Some evidence has supported that prison vitiations more generally, can produce positive effects, including a reduction in recidivism and increased inmate well-being (Schuhmann et al., 2018). Additionally, research has identified that the benefits of volunteer work have a “bidirectional dynamic,” where both the volunteer and the communities they are aiding can experience mutually beneficial outcomes (MacNeela & Gannon, 2013), which will be explored further below.

Benefits experienced by the inmates- mental health

Literature links community volunteer visitations to improved mental health outcomes for inmates (Schuhmann et al., 2018). This connection is explained by the sustained prosocial support volunteers offer and the development of positive social capital, countering the negative and institutionalising prison environment (Schuhmann et al., 2018). Inmates can have confidential conversations with volunteers, who represent a disconnection from authoritarian power, allowing them to develop a trusting relationship with the volunteers (Schuhmann et al., 2018; Dewey et al., 2021; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Furthermore, volunteers provide and restore important connective links between inmates and the communities in which they have been isolated during their incarceration (Cochran & Mears, 2013). The positive impacts on inmate well-being are often attributed to the concept of 'social capital' (Boneham & Sixsmith, 2003). Broadly, the idea of social capital is defined by Portes (1998), as the involvement and participation in social groups which can produce positive consequences for the individual and the broader community. The prison environment is characterised by isolation and separation from the outside community as a mechanism of punishment, and as a result, breaking social ties and community networks diminishes the ability of inmates to develop strong social capital (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Consequently, isolation and the diminishes in social capital are argued to contribute to increased stress, repeated criminal behaviour, self-harm, and suicide among inmates (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Folk et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2009). Moreover, many inmates enter prison with complex mental health needs, and the prison's psychological and well-being services are strained and inadequate (Monasterio et al., 2020; Mckenna et al., 2021).

Volunteers, however, can play a central role in creating and maintaining social capital and can work to restore social ties and relationships which may have been fragmented during an individual's incarceration (Boneham & Sixsmith, 2003; Albertson & Hall, 2019). Some criminological literature argues that through visitations from community volunteers, as the inmates engage in their programs and services, inmates have opportunities to form prosocial relationships, skills, and bonds, which are all critical factors in crime desistance and can enable social capital development for both the volunteer and the inmate (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Schuhmann et al., 2018; Boneham & Sixsmith, 2003). Volunteers as independent from prison staff represent the institutional power of the prison and therefore have more ability to offer inmates more humanising, sustained support, where inmates are more trusting and open to interactions with volunteers (Crewe et al., 2015; Liebling & Arnold, 2012), which is analysed more in the following section.

Educational benefits

The already low educational attainment present in a large proportion of the inmate population, as well as the barriers imposed by the prison environment itself, restricts the inmates' ability to acquire the necessary workplace skills and qualifications needed for successful reintegration (Gillies et al., 2014). Aside from the low literacy and numeracy rates of the average prisoner in New Zealand (Banks, 2017), the prison environment itself imposes further restrictions on inmate education (Gillies et al., 2014). Such barriers include the authoritarian nature of prison staff as well as the limited educational programs available for the inmates (Gillies et al., 2014; Dewey et al., 2021). Gillies et al. (2014) argue that the punitive and authoritarian approach of prison staff as facilitated by neo-paternalism, is a systemic issue that can deter inmates from engaging in programs out of fear of being ridiculed or judged for their educational ability. Under the neo-paternalistic framework, prison staff may adopt a more authoritarian approach where inmates perceive staff as representatives of institutional power, which hinders the ability of prisoners and staff to form positive relationships (Crewe et al., 2015). The historically strained relationships between prison staff and inmates are argued to have been exacerbated by the increasing casualisation of prison staff roles, intensified work demands, and understaffing among frontline correctional officers brought on by the neoliberal shifts discussed in the introduction (Crewe et al., 2015). However, volunteers are increasingly recognised as having an essential educational role within this broader context of strained prisoner-staff relationships outlined above (Dewey et al., 2021; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Schuhmann et al., 2018). Research suggests that volunteers, who are distinct and disconnected from the authoritarian environment of the prison and its staff, can work to overcome institutional barriers that limit inmate engagement and work to increase the number of educational programs available to inmates (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Schuhmann et al., 2018; Duwe & Johnson, 2016).

The benefits for volunteers

The benefits of volunteering have been described as a 'bidirectional dynamic' where both the community and the volunteers can benefit from voluntary work (MacNeela & Gannon, 2013). The bidirectional dynamic is also true in a prison volunteerism context where research has noted the mutual benefits gained not only for the inmates but also for the individual carrying out the volunteering (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Schuhmann et al., 2018; Boneham & Sixsmith, 2003). Research using self-report and survey data of prison volunteers has reported positive psychological effects for the volunteers, including a strong sense of accomplishment, fulfilment, and satisfaction for their work (Lowe et al., 2019; Dabney, 2004). Additionally, volunteers indicated that their

volunteering work led to the emergence of new career interests and provided opportunities for career advancement (Lowe et al., 2019). Research also indicates that volunteers can undergo a transformation of pre-existing stereotypical assumptions about inmates and their offending (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Just Speak, 2014; Gilmour & Alessi, 2022). Hinck et al., (2019) discuss that through the process of experiential learning, which is a process predicated on learning through hands-on experience, the volunteers can understand the broader structural impacts of offending, which can lead to changes in their perceptions and where volunteers became more humanising towards incarcerated people. This process is significant as Chui and Cheng (2012) summarise past literature that discusses how prejudiced assumptions toward prisoners can hinder effective rehabilitation.

In summary, prison volunteerism offers a range of benefits that are mutually beneficial and multi-dimensional. Volunteers and their programs provide inmates with an opportunity to enhance their well-being in an environment where access to psychological services may be limited, such as lack of access to psychologists and therapeutic activities especially within ‘high-risk units’ (Mills & Kendall, 2019; Monasterio et al., 2020). Through volunteer interactions, inmates can develop social capital, establish prosocial relationships, and receive support from individuals who are not associated with the authoritarian and controlling roles of custodial prison staff. Additionally, volunteers play a vital role in working to overcome educational barriers faced by inmates where education opportunities within the prison are limited and hindered by strained inmate-staff relationships. Volunteers themselves also experience a multitude of benefits including personal growth, positive impacts on well-being, and career development, as well as undergoing an experiential learning process that resulted in a shift in previously held beliefs about inmates. The following section will outline the challenges that impact prison volunteers and their programs.

Challenges and Barriers Facing Prison Volunteerism:

The bureaucracy of prison institutions

From the literature, the most significant challenges and barriers volunteers encountered by volunteers were due to the highly bureaucratic and risk-averse structure of the prison environment (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Wright & Bronstein, 2007). Prisons prioritise the incapacitation of inmates and ensure the control and security of the prison are always maintained (Craig, 2004). Consequently, prison institutions are organised via stringent bureaucratic and risk-

averse arrangements which are fundamental to their operations (Wright & Bronstein, 2007). Volunteers, as external entities, must navigate and work within this total institution. The idea of a 'total institution' is defined in Goffman's (1961) work, which explains that total institutions are closed systems organised by strict rules and structures. Goffman (1957, pp. 44) further typifies total institutions into five areas, where prison institutions are categorised as "places that are organised to protect the community against what is thought to be intentional dangers to it." However, for volunteers as separate entities, they must exist within this total institution, operating under their own, often opposing, organisational arrangements and worldviews (Wright & Bronstein, 2007). Volunteers approach prison work with a therapeutic culture and ethos which takes a secondary role compared to the primary objective of maintaining security and control within the prison (Craig, 2004; Sinclair, 2017).

Volunteer responses in various studies disclosed that the complex administrative policies of the prison they worked within created multiple barriers that hindered their programs and services (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Salsels & Costa, 2022). These barriers, identified in the research, included delays in gaining access to the prison facility due to strict administrative policies and lack of communication from staff (Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Consequently, volunteers felt that the prison's stringent policies discouraged visitation by volunteers and disrupted the progress consistency (Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Volunteers also expressed dissatisfaction with the dramatic and intimidating nature of prison-led orientations and inductions, which at times, affected the recruitment and retention of volunteers (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Salselas & Costa, 2022). On a more interpersonal level, volunteers have also expressed challenges as they navigated relationships with prison staff, as explored below.

Staff and volunteer relations

Tensions between the goals and arrangements of volunteers and the prison extend beyond the organisational level and can also manifest in interpersonal relations between prison staff and volunteers (Just Speak, 2014). Research has shown that corrections staff often have reservations about volunteers entering the prison, perceiving them as additional security burdens (Arthur & Valentine, 2018). In a study by Kort-Butler and Malone (2015), some respondents discussed feeling unwelcomed by some staff members who appeared irritated and suspicious of volunteers; however, others did report encountering polite and supportive staff (Arthur & Valentine, 2018). Literature acknowledges the presence of tensions between volunteers and staff, attributing security concerns

and conflicting interests between prison management and volunteers as the primary challenges in correctional partnerships (Dewey et al., 2021). Aside from staff, volunteers can also experience interpersonal challenges as they interact and work with inmates from all backgrounds and security levels.

Interpersonal challenges with inmates

Volunteers can face interpersonal challenges when working with inmates. Such challenges include the emotional labour required to strike a balance between establishing personal boundaries while still being able to offer support and foster a trusting relationship with the inmates (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Loughnan, 2022). Volunteers also must mitigate any personal risks they may encounter working in a prison environment which can expose volunteers to potential verbal or physical aggression from inmates (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Clinks, 2016). While setting boundaries and protecting their safety, volunteers must then also work to build levels of trust with the inmates who may be sceptical of outsiders (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004). Additionally, volunteers need to navigate the complex emotions exhibited by inmates, such as emotional hardness, anger, self-resentment, and lack of motivation (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). These emotional complexities pose challenges for volunteers who may have limited training in dealing with inmates' psychological needs such as the high prevalence of complex mental illness amongst inmates, drug dependency issues, cognitive/intellectual disability, and anger management problems (McKenna et al., 2021).

Prison Volunteerism in a New Zealand Context:

Community prison volunteers are substantially active within New Zealand prison spaces today, as of 2019, 1,700 authorised volunteers were actively engaged in providing services within our prisons and have provided over 6000 hours of voluntary prison work each month (Garrick, 2019). As stated by Gilmour and Alessi (2022), “the voluntary sector plays an important role in providing programs for inmates and helping shape the culture within New Zealand correction facilities” (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022, pp.3). Many volunteer organisations exist within New Zealand that deliver in-prison rehabilitative services, such as the ‘New Zealand Howard League’ which is a prominent volunteer-based organisation that provides reintegrative prison programs. This organisation has about 200 active volunteers who work to provide literacy and numeracy classes (Smith, 2019). The following

section details some of the research that has explored New Zealand's' prison volunteerism specifically.

Past research

Gilmour and Alessi (2022) evaluated a New Zealand a university student-led prison volunteer program, aiming to evaluate the potential and limitations of a student-led service-learning initiative. Their study found that students who participated in such an initiative were often driven by a desire to give back to the community in a positive way (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022). The students also reported becoming “critically aware” where their discourses and perceptions around punitive justice and prisoners, in general, became challenged and transformed during their close interactions with inmates, as well as becoming more aware of greater sociological forces that contribute to offending (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022, p.5). Such findings are mirrored in international studies where volunteer respondents also reported such transformations in previously held beliefs about inmates and criminal offending more broadly (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Hinck et al, 2019; Chui & Cheng, 2012). Loughnan (2022) explored volunteer perspectives as they worked with imprisoned New Zealand mothers and explored how volunteers navigated the tensions and challenges which arose from their work, specifically focusing on tensions between powers of race, gender, and class. Sinclair (2017) reports on New Zealand prison volunteerism which is compared to international prison volunteer initiatives to provide recommendations for how New Zealand can better implement prison volunteer efforts. Lowe et al., (2019) explored the motivations of volunteers taking part in a Circles of Support and Accountability group with past convicted sex offenders in New Zealand.

There is a significant gap in the field of prison volunteerism, both internationally and in New Zealand, despite calls from various stakeholders, including Corrections, non-governmental agencies, and researchers, to increase understanding in this area (Loughnan, 2022; Internal Affairs, 2022; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Gilmour & Alessi, 2022). In the context of New Zealand, research specifically exploring the challenges and limitations of prison volunteering is lacking (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022; Just Speak, 2014; Helminen & Mills, 2019). Helminen and Mills (2019) argue that community volunteers have received little attention within criminology in New Zealand and knowledge in this area is still theoretically underdeveloped. New Zealand research has called attention to the dominance of existing research focusing on American-based religious volunteers (Helminen & Mills, 2019; Gilmour & Alessi, 2022; Loughnan, 2022). Loughnan (2022) discusses how the general lack of research surrounding prison volunteerism, internationally and in New

Zealand, can be understood due to volunteer work being socially invisible and undervalued within capitalist society. More specifically, criminological research has traditionally focused on research surrounding correctional institutions, and the experiences of incarcerated individuals, often overlooking the contributions of volunteers in the prison setting (Helminen & Mills, 2019). Furthermore, research into volunteer programs has focused heavily on conducting empirical evaluations of the effectiveness of volunteer-led programs, primarily education programs, due to the emphasis within corrections on providing evidence-based programs (Cullen, 2013; Dewey et al., 2018; Schuhmann et al., 2018). Considering these gaps in literature and research, this research sheds light on the perspectives of New Zealand volunteers and bridges the knowledge gap by contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the important work of prison community volunteers. The methodology employed in the present study will now be outlined.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This methodology chapter begins by outlining my use of a qualitative research methodology, as well as my reasoning for using a semi-structured interview technique. I then discuss my use of Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis as the method I used to analyse my qualitative data. I then outline the theoretical assumptions that I approached my research from (Braun and Clarke, (2019; 2022)). A qualitative design and reflexive thematic analysis are justified here for primarily allowing analysis into the subjective experiences of prison volunteers while allowing me to generate rich data accounts from a smaller sample size. I then move to explain the research process which includes describing the participants, the recruitment process, the interview, and the transcription process, as well as the analysis stage, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six phases of analysis. To end, I discuss the ethical considerations that I considered throughout the research process.

Qualitative methodology

My research question, 'What are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experience and the benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within a New Zealand setting?' will be explored using a qualitative research design. As I wanted to explore the subjective experiences of New Zealand community prison volunteers, employing a qualitative design was most appropriate. Jackson et al., (2007, pp.22) state that qualitative research allows for, "understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences..." Qualitative research broadly aims to understand how individuals ascribe meaning to their experiences (Brennen, 2017; Hammarberg, 2016). When considering this research and deciding to explore the subjective experiences of volunteers, I knew that I wanted to prioritise the participants' voice at the centre of this study, as qualitative design, "relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to question about how they have constructed or understood their experiences" (Jackson et al., 2007, pp. 22) Further justification for employing a qualitative design is due to the format of this project, which is a smaller pilot study, due to the constraints of my master's requirements. Qualitative research is suitable in this case, as it is an effective method to gather rich data from smaller sample sizes (Hammarberg, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews

Within qualitative research, interviews are the most common way to retrieve data, which I used due to the ability of interviews to directly engage with participants, allowing for an examination of their experiences while amplifying their voices and perspectives (Jamshed, 2014; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were used for several reasons (Hammarberg, 2016; Evans & Lewis, 2018; Ruslin et al., 2022). Firstly, a primary benefit of a semi-structured interview approach is that it allows for a balance between a more structured and flexible approach when gathering information from participants (Evans & Lewis, 2018). The interview schedule allowed me to pre-formulate any questions/main topics that I perceived to be essential to cover in the interview process (Evans & Lewis, 2018; Ruslin et al., 2022). The guide for the interview schedule was drawn from past research in this area such as Kort-Butler & Malone's (2015) study. Additionally, I developed the interview schedule so that it was centred around three of the current projects' main areas to be explored which included general experiences, the perceived benefits (i.e., the benefits to themselves and the inmates), and the challenges faced in the role (i.e., challenges revolving around working with prison staff or the inmates themselves). Ruslin et al., (2022) state that it is important for the schedule to follow a framework of themes to be explored, therefore, the interview schedule needed to be centred around the three key themes that would be covered (experiences, benefits, and challenges of volunteer work). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow me as the researcher to be flexible, adding in new questions as the interview developed and progressed, and based on the responses of the interviewee (Ruslin et al., 2022). This flexibility was important as it meant any other topics that arose during the interviews could be further explored, rather than being restricted by a strict interview guide (Ruslin et al., 2022). Furthermore, a semi-structured approach is beneficial for developing a conversation like an interview with the participants which allows the researchers to build rapport and create a more relaxed environment (Ruslin et al., 2022; Evans & Lewis, 2018). In the context of smaller pilot studies, semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in gathering detailed data from a limited number of participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis:

The chosen methodology for analysing the data in this study is reflexive thematic analysis. This method, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021), aims to identify, organise, analyse, and report on shared patterns of meaning or 'themes' within the data. Reflexive thematic analysis is a fundamental approach in qualitative analysis and is regarded by its high degree of flexibility in its application

across various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Furthermore, this method can generate detailed and comprehensive insights into the data, which aligns with the objectives of this research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). The ability for reflexive thematic analysis to explore individuals' experiences and interpretations, identify shared meaning across participants, and allow for the incorporation of a researcher's positionality in the research process, were some of the justifications for the selection of this analysis method, and are discussed below.

Firstly, this study aimed to address a gap in research by focusing on prison volunteerism in New Zealand, specifically from the perspective of the volunteers themselves. The primary objective was to examine three central areas: the volunteers' general experiences, the perceived benefits of volunteering, and the challenges. The use of reflexive thematic analysis was suitable for this study as the method allows for the detection and identification of participants' interpretations of their experiences, aligning with my goal of placing the volunteers' voices at the centre of the research (Alhojailan, 2012). Additionally, reflexive thematic analysis enables the exploration of shared patterns of meaning across multiple participants, which in the case of this study was useful to examine potential similarities or points of differences in volunteers' experiences within my sample, but also with past research (Alhojailan, 2012; Braun and Clark, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Secondly, reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the active role of the researcher in knowledge construction and allows for constant reflection throughout the research process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2021). Both a qualitative design and reflexive thematic analysis, allow the researcher to be cognizant of their position within the research, rather than assuming a more detached position, as typical in quantitative studies (Jackson et al., 2007; Holmes, 2020). Recognising my connectedness to this topic was important due to my history as a prison volunteer, where this connection to the topic and some of the participants is encouraged to be brought into the research process to guide the analysis and reflexively engage throughout the process (Bryne, 2022).

Encouraging my position as a researcher but also as a past volunteer also allowed me to connect with the participants during the interview phase which created a more open and conversational discussion and aided in the ability to gain rich data from the interviews I conducted. While Braun and Clarke (2021) recognise that the researcher's subjectivity is a useful part of the research process and can guide the analysis, the participants' experiences were kept central to the project.

Theoretical assumptions in reflexive thematic analysis

This study adopted an experiential orientation, which focuses on understanding how participants experience a given phenomenon or circumstance (Bryne, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Choosing an experiential orientation was appropriate in this current project, as it prioritises the volunteers' account of their volunteering experience and the meaning that they attributed to the benefits of prison volunteer work and the challenges volunteers encounter within the prison environment. Secondly, concerning coding, this study employed a combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches. Bryne (2022) argues that coding analysis often involves a blend of these approaches, rather than exclusively relying on one. Drawing from prior research which had been collated for the literature review, some preconceived themes were derived from the experiences of volunteers in an American context, using deductive coding to identify any similarities or divergences between New Zealand volunteer experience and an overseas context. Inductive coding/open coding was primarily used to capture the participants' meaning in their own words, rather than imposing preconceived theories or frameworks that might not be relevant for a New Zealand prison volunteerism context. Thirdly, this study also used semantic coding, which focuses on the explicit surface meaning of the data (Bryne, 2022). Semantic coding was chosen to again prioritise and centre the volunteer' perspectives and that the generated codes accurately represented the data.

Research Procedure:

In this section, I will outline the research process, which will first provide a general description of the participants and then explain the recruitment process. Then, I will move into detailing my research method which includes how I conducted the interviews, the transcribing process, as well as my data analysis phase. Lastly, I will outline the ethical considerations that I accounted for in this research project.

Participant Descriptions

The main selection criteria used for the selection of my participants was that they had to be involved in a prison volunteer initiative or program within New Zealand. There were no relevant exclusion criteria. As such, all the participants were or had been involved in prison volunteering in some capacity. Participants of all ages and experiences were sought to get a variety of experiences coming

through in my data. Two young adults and university students India and Bryne¹ co-ran a creative writing class. Mary, a previous criminology student, ran an educational tutoring course for inmates. Alice and Belinda are two members of Good Bitches Baking. Good Bitches Baking (GBB) is a New Zealand charitable organisation that has various chapters across the country and comprises a network of volunteers who bake for various communities in need (Good Bitches Baking, n.d). Alice and Belinda took part in GBB's 'Prison Bake' initiative where members go into prisons to bake with inmates with the baking then donated to various recipients (Good Bitches Baking, n.d). Senior-aged Lorraine has a background in English literature and had previously been a psychiatric nurse. She currently convenes an in-prison voluntary book club for male inmates.

Recruitment of participants

Once the study had received approval from the Otago University Ethics Committee for a category B research project (see Appendix D), I began the recruitment of participants. Convenience sampling and purposive sampling was used. Convenience sampling was facilitated through personal connections and contacts of both me and my supervisor. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are easily accessible to the researcher and is often considered a low-cost and straightforward method of participant selection (Etikan et al., 2015). However, it has been criticised for its potential lack of rigour compared to other sampling methods (Etikan et al., 2015). Nonetheless, for a smaller pilot study such as the current study, convenience sampling is recommended (Etikan et al., 2015). Given the constraints of my master's project and the absence of funding, leveraging personal and supervisor contacts were necessary to make every effort to have an adequate number of participants.

For the selection of participants from the volunteer organisation, Good Bitches Baking, purposive sampling was employed. To initiate the recruitment process, I contacted the general manager, who posted an email callout and distributed the information sheet for the study (see Appendix A), on my behalf. There was a substantial level of interest generated but given the small-scale size of the study, only two participants were selected using purposive sampling. Selection, in this case, was based on their years of experience as prison volunteers and their level of involvement with the 'prison bake' program, aiming to include participants who possessed greater experience. Purposive sampling is a selected sampling technique utilised by researchers to include participants who possess specific knowledge and expertise related to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). Given the large number

¹ Some personal and place names have been changed throughout the project for anonymity.

of responses received and the constraints of the current study, purposive sampling was appropriate as I had to choose a limited number of participations who could provide rich accounts of their prison experience (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015).

All participants received a copy of the participant information sheet (see Appendix A) which outlined the specifics of the study, and all received a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) where participants could select whether they would be named in the project or kept anonymous to protect their privacy. Once participants had read the information sheet, and signed the consent form, the interviews could take place, the interview process is detailed below.

Interview process

Once participants had been selected and informed consent was signed, the participants took part in an interview lasting from forty-five minutes to an hour-long. Interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom depending on the location of the participants, and what was easiest for them. Relevant COVID-19 protections were put in place for in-person interviews, as well as being in a semi-public location for comfort and accessibility. I followed ethical considerations around the interview location to protect the privacy of the conversation as well as allow the participants to be comfortable during this process (Cypress, 2018). The two physical interviews were conducted in a booked library room. The Zoom locations could be in whatever space was most comfortable for the participants.

An outline of the general line of questioning which included questions regarding the volunteers' experiences and perspectives of prison volunteer work, was sent to the participant before the scheduled interview so that participants confirmed they were comfortable with the questions (see Appendix B). Within the information sheet (see Appendix A) and the consent forms (see Appendix C), participants were made aware that while some questions had been pre-approved by the university's ethics board, and the sociology department, the rest of the questioning would depend on the way the interview developed. Before the interviews, I also did some research for GBB on their organisation as well as their Prison Bake program, so that I was well-informed about the participants and well-prepared for the interviews (McGrath et al., 2018). On the information sheets, as well as before formal interviewing took place, I reminded participants that if at any time they became uncomfortable with the questions, they could decline and withdraw from the project at any stage. The interviews were all audio recorded, and if on Zoom, were also screen recorded as a backup, in case any of the audio was corrupted in some way.

The transcribing process

Transcription of the interviews commenced immediately after the conclusion of the interview process. The transcription process involved creating a written record of the audio recordings. To expedite this process, transcription software "Otter.AI" was utilised to generate drafted written accounts of the recordings. Subsequently, I listened to the audio and made any corrections to the transcription in a Microsoft Word document to ensure accuracy in capturing both the content and manner of speech, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Braun and Clarke (2021) remind us that there are ethical concerns to consider within the transcription process as transcripts can contain identifiable information. Considering this, all place names, and the names of those wishing to remain anonymous were changed. Additionally, participants were sent the transcript and given an allocated time of two- to three weeks to make any amendments to the content that they did not want to be featured in the project. All the audio recordings and transcriptions were kept on a password-locked device to ensure their safety and were only listened to or viewed by myself and my supervisor. Additionally, the backup screen recordings taken on the Zoom interviews were immediately deleted after the transcription process, as well as any other audio recordings.

The Analysis Stage:

After the transcriptions had been finalised and confirmed by each of the participants, I began the analysis phase. The analysis of the transcriptions was grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006;2021) six phases of thematic analysis which include. An overview of the analysis process is outlined below.

1. ***Familiarisation with the data:*** Braun and Clarke (2006;2021) describe this process as actively and analytically reading the data to make notes of interest and becoming familiar with each of the datasets. For me, this involved reading over the transcriptions multiple times and noting down some initial points of interest as well as making notes of common patterns which emerged across the dataset.
2. ***Coding of the data:*** After I had become familiarised with the data, initial codes were created both deductively and inductively. Coding was broadly organised into the project's

three main areas which were the general experiences of the volunteers, the benefits of volunteering, and the challenges of volunteer prison work. *Figure 1*. Demonstrates how initial coding was done for each interview which was organised via the three central aspects of the study and colour coded for clarity.

3. ***Generating initial themes***: After initial codes were created for each interview as seen in *Figure 1*, broader initial themes were created by comparing the tables across the datasets to seek similarities and points of difference which allowed me to sort out the general themes to analyse. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that themes are patterns across the data that capture something significant concerning the research question. The themes were again, organised based on the three central aspects of the study. As an example, under the ‘challenges’ category, the broad themes which emerged included, ‘strict rules/bureaucratic nature of the prison inhibiting volunteers’, and ‘balancing personal safety and inmate connection.’
4. ***Reviewing themes***. Once a draft of the themes was made and categorised under the three core areas of the study, these themes were compared and reviewed to ensure they were supported by the codes categorised within them, if any overlapped with each other and were too similar, they were deleted. This was not a linear process and included me often revising the themes and codes many times as I became further familiar with the data where Braun and Clarke (2021) posit that my process of revising and redeveloping themes is the essence of reflexive research which is a non-linear and an interchangeable process.
5. ***Defining and naming the themes***. This process was the final step in creating the themes which would be discussed within the main body chapters of my project. Themes were selected based on their strong reoccurrence across each of the participant’s interviews or which aligned or converged from past research accounts. I wanted to ensure the themes I had selected represented a story that enlightened the reader about the experiences of a prison volunteer, the volunteer's understanding of the benefits of prison volunteer work, and to become aware of the challenges faced by such individuals.

Initial Codes: Interview 1 (India)
Volunteers background and Experience:
Opportunity to volunteer through university- Background
Navigating conversations with prisoners- Experience
Prison induction using scare tactics- Experience
Benefits:
Volunteering as a privilege
Exposure to different backgrounds/types of people
Witnessing personal growth within inmates
Challenges:
Pressure to adhere and stick to the prison rules
Volunteering as a time commitment
Balancing relationship with inmates and personal safety

Figure 1. Initial codes are used to sort each transcript, organised by the three central areas of the project.

Ethical Considerations:

Throughout the research process, my supervisor continuously guided me through the ethical considerations of qualitative research. The current study also adhered to the University of Otago guidelines, receiving acceptance from the Human Ethics Committee under a Category B research application (see Appendix D). Additionally, multiple ethical principles guide qualitative research which were adhered to in this study and outlined below (Shaw, 2003).

Informed consent

Informed consent is regarded as the “cornerstone of the ethical conduct and regulation of research (Bhutta, 2004, pp. 771). Informed consent is needed for the protection of the participants to ensure they consent to their participation and the use of their information and stories (Shaw, 2003). In this case, participants were required to sign an information sheet before any participation could occur (see Appendix A). The information sheet ensured participants had all the information about the study so that they could weigh up the costs and benefits of their participation and make an informed decision to partake. Additionally, participants then signed the consent form (see Appendix D). The consent form asked participants to indicate their desired level of anonymity. Participants could either choose to remain anonymous, to which I supplied them with a pseudonym, or to allow their first name to be used within the study. I received consent from the General Manager of GBB for the use of their name and relevant terms within the project (see Appendix E). Before any interviews commenced, participants were reminded of the consent form and its contents and presented their

signed consent before any interviewing took place. Distance participants who took part in Zoom interviews were required to send a digital copy of their signed consent before the interview date. All participants were reminded that they would be audio recorded before interviews commenced.

Confidentiality and privacy

Confidentiality and privacy of those involved in the study are additionally important in the ethics of qualitative research (Shaw, 2003). As noted earlier, the names of those participants wishing to remain anonymous were changed to a pseudonym. Throughout the project, any mention of prison names, names of places that could link the participants somehow, or any other names of people who were mentioned and who did not sign the required consent form, were either fully omitted, or pseudonyms were used. Any of the raw data that was collected such as the audio recordings and transcripts were not published or made public in any way. Only approved people such as myself and my supervisor had access to the raw data and participant information. As the project was not externally funded, no outside organisations had access to the data. Data obtained will be retained for at least five years, however, any personal information will be destroyed after the research, as stated in the information sheet signed by each participant. To further protect their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, as stated earlier, participants had two-to-three weeks to make any amendments to the final transcript.

Ethics of researching people known to the researcher

I knew two of the participants prior to the research process. There are ethical considerations to consider when researching and interviewing people that are known to you as the researcher (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010). Insider research is when research is conducted within groups that the researcher is also a member of (Asselin, 2003). Insider research can be advantageous in qualitative research as it can build a common bond between researchers and participants and accelerate the rapport-building phases of research (Asselin, 2003; McConnell-Henry et al., 2010). My connection to volunteering was valuable in the context of this current project, however, some additional ethical considerations were considered. McConnell-Henry et al., (2010) lay out some key concerns and guidance regarding researching and interviewing people you know. McConnell-Henry et al., (2010) state that when researching people known to the researcher, participants may feel more willing to disclose more emotional and unexpected responses. When participants did share more emotional experiences, I did not press them to share further, and participants were reminded that they could omit any of these comments later in the transcription process.

Reflexivity and positionality

Ethics surrounding insider research reminds the researcher to “undertake an examination of their origins, bias, and understandings; to be supportive of participants; to be open to understanding their experiences; and to judiciously share experiences and reciprocate with the participants...” (Quinney et al., 2016, pp. 5). While I used my connection as an advantage at times, to build rapport, create more open conversations, and relate with my participant’, I was always reflexively aware of the ethical issues that come with being connected with a topic and the participants (Quinney et al., 2016). Additionally, as outlined before, situating myself on the theoretical assumptions laid out by Braun and Clarke (2021) provided me with frameworks to approach the research which encouraged my connection, while maintaining that the voices of the participants were kept central.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines my justification for my use of a qualitative research methodology, as well as my reasoning for using a semi-structured interview technique. I then turn to outline my use of Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis as the method I used to analyse my qualitative data. I also outlined my theoretical assumptions as outlined by Braun and Clarke, (2019; 2022), where I approached my research from an experiential orientation and relied on a combination of inductive and deductive coding, as well as semantic coding. The above methods were justified primarily as they allowed for deep analysis into the subjective experiences of prison volunteers while allowing me to generate rich data accounts from a smaller sample size. Additionally, these methods were selected as they also allowed me to analyse the experiences of prison volunteer workers, from the voice of the perspectives of volunteers themselves. I outlined the research process, explaining the participants, recruitment, interview, and transcription process, as well as outlining the analysis stage. To end, I discussed the ethical considerations that I considered throughout the research process.

Chapter Four: “Nothing, I think can prepare you for going into a prison” – First Encounters with the Foreign Prison Environment

This chapter provides an overview of the participants, their entry into prison volunteering, and their motivations. I also explore the participants’ initial experiences with the prison environment as first-time prison volunteers. It was found that participants joined through university courses or pre-existing associations with volunteer-based organisations. This chapter applies a Functional Approach to volunteer motivations (Clary et al., 1998) and draws from previous research on volunteers working with ex-offenders (Lowe et al., 2019) to explain the participants’ diverse motivations. This chapter moves to explore the volunteers’ initial encounters with the prison environment, particularly their induction experiences, which generated unease and anxiety. Tensions between the prison’s emphasis on control and security and the volunteers’ altruistic aspirations are revealed. These tensions between these two cultures of the volunteers and the prison, permeate throughout the following chapters and will be explored further. The chapter concludes by emphasising the positive experiences shared by all participants, and their efforts to navigate through the initial anxieties.

An Introduction to the Volunteers: Motivations and Pathways to Prison Volunteering:

Personal background and recruitment

Past research into prison volunteerism has sought to profile prison volunteers, particularly in an American religious context, to generate an understanding of who participates in prison volunteering and how they come into such a role (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Kort-Butler & Malone). Such research has tended to profile volunteers as typically white, middle-aged older men who come from higher education levels, mainly recruited via their affiliations with religious organisations (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Lowe et al., 2019). The current participants ranged from college-aged to senior-aged and came from a range of educational backgrounds. Past research indicates that most individuals are frequently recruited for prison volunteer work, through charitable organisations that they are already members of (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Lowe et al., 2019). Within a New Zealand context, recruitment of prison volunteers through their memberships with varying charitable organisations is also common, where around one-third of prison volunteers are involved in non-profit organisations (Internal Affairs, 2022). Participants Alice, Belinda, and Lorraine were all recruited through their

varying memberships with organisations. Alice, who had been a member of Good Bitches Baking (GBB) since 2016, took part in the pilot Prison Bake program and then again, the following year, until moving into a paid position within GBB. Belinda joined the eight-week program which she participated in until COVID-19-related disruptions.

“So, it [Prison Bake] was designed as an eight-week, baking program, where we went in groups and taught baking to prisoners who were in the self-care unit.” (Belinda).

Lorraine, a senior-aged participant, with a university background in literature, was already involved with a national book discussion scheme when she was asked to run a prison-based book club. Lorraine started the volunteer prison book club in 2019, which she continued until 2021, as again COVID-19 restricted prison visitations.

“Then one day, three years ago, the book discussion scheme sent an email to all the conveners in Blue Lake City² and said, “Will anybody volunteer to start a book club at the Blue Lake Prison?” So, I stuck my name down.” (Lorraine).

Research indicates that volunteers, like Alice, Belinda, and Lorraine who have pre-existing memberships with volunteer-based organisations, are heavily relied upon to carry out the specific services supplied by their organisations and are important parts of maintaining their organisation’s core missions (Clary et al., 1992). Getting volunteers through their affiliations with varying non-profit organisations and agencies is an effective recruitment strategy, as the Department of Corrections already has established partnerships with organisations such as NZPARS, The Salvation Army, and The Howard League, which can acquire experienced and willing volunteers to relieve some of the pressure Corrections currently faces in providing inmate services (Clary et al., 1998; Lowe et al., 2019). University courses offer another avenue for individuals to engage in prison volunteering efforts. Gilmour and Alessi (2022) studied New Zealand students, who through their criminology paper were offered the opportunity to provide prison programs on a volunteer basis. In New Zealand, various universities and their students are involved in prison volunteering, with examples such as Law for Change students from Otago University regularly organising creative writing, volleyball, and art classes, while students from Auckland University volunteer to aid incarcerated mothers with the care of their babies (Laws for Change, n.d; Burton, 2019). In the

² All place and some personal names have been changed for anonymity.

current study, two young adult participants, India and Bryne ran a prison creative writing course, with the opportunity arising through their university criminology course. The creative writing course spanned eleven weeks and encompassed teaching and supporting inmates in developing skills related to fiction writing, poetry, letter writing, and more.

“I applied to do the volunteering, during a class the lecturer had asked, “If you're interested, get in touch.” (Bryne).

Mary, on the other hand, initially connected with a prison staff member through her undergraduate criminology course and became an independent volunteer for Corrections providing education tutoring. Mary ran one-on-one educational tutoring for inmates for a year and a half, which involved assisting inmates in gaining fundamental literacy and numeracy skills and qualifications, before moving into a paid role within Corrections.

“It wasn't just about the baking; it was about teaching kindness”- Motivations behind prison volunteering

Beyond trying to profile prison volunteers, past research has also sought to understand the underlying motivations of prison volunteering (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Lowe et al., 2019; Chui & Cheng, 2013). Research on volunteer motivations has offered various theories and models to contextualise why individuals choose to volunteer (Meek & Mills, 2010; Widjaja, 2010; Souza & Dhimi, 2008). It was identified that the participants in the current study also expressed strong altruistic motivations which often drove their decision to work in a volunteer capacity with inmates. For Belinda, as a long-time GBB member, their mission centres around using baking to exemplify and promote kindness within various communities. By working with inmates, Belinda could actively embody GBB's mission of spreading and role-modelling kindness to vulnerable members of the community.

“I guess when you volunteer you don't kind of do it for any accolades. I'd like to think you do it because you really do care, and you want to give back to people that are in really tough situations.”

Lorraine rooted her altruistic desires in her love of reading. Her decision to help run an in-prison book club was grounded in being able to share her passion with others, in hopes they would also find joy in reading.

“My motivation is that I love books. It had little to do with the fact it was a prison...but if I can help a group of people to love reading...And if I can help young men to enjoy reading, then that’s my motivation.”

Additional to altruistic desires, volunteers also expressed varying other motivating factors behind their decisions to volunteer in a prison setting. Guided by the six functions within the functional approach for explaining volunteer motivations which include, the values function, the understanding function, the social function, the career function, the protective function, and the enhancement function (Clary et al., 1998), as well as restorative motivations identified in volunteers working with convicted sex offenders (Lowe et al., 2019), I will outline and explain the other motivations identified in the current participants. In the current study, the values/altruistic function, careers function, and restorative motivations were identified as motivations for the current study and will be explored below. The *career function* is related to a volunteer’s desire to gain career experience, as well as becoming aligned with potential career prospects and pathways made available through their volunteering role, which were particularly relevant to India, Bryne, and Mary who as university students during their volunteering, could develop career-based experiences and skills (Clary et al., 1998; MacNeela & Gannon, 2013; Williamson et al., 2017). After redirecting her academic pursuits towards criminology, India seized the prison volunteer opportunity to develop more work exposure for her new interest in criminology and the justice sector.

“And then when I started getting into my criminology papers, I thought this might be something that I want to pursue instead. And so, I thought, what can I do to get involved and get a bit more exposure? And I thought volunteering at a prison would be quite cool.”

Restorative motivations were identified as motivations for many of the volunteers in the current study. Restorative motivations, as explained in Lowe et al., (2019) refer to an individual’s desire to reduce reoffending, contribute to shifts away from punitive discourse, as well as apply their rehabilitative or restorative justice beliefs within the prison setting. Mary, who came into volunteering as a university criminology student, made explicit references to her position concerning

the justice system, the problems she perceived to be present in such a system, and her motivation to do her part in preventing the cycle of crime, through the provision of education.

“We've got the second highest incarceration rate in the world and the highest reoffending rate. And so, I was coming from well, if we can make a difference in these people's lives and help them to do better when they get out, to make better choices, to feel more connected to the community, then we can make a difference.”

Bryne similarly had restorative and justice-based motivations which were initially fostered through their sociological university education. Bryne discussed developing a more critical understanding of the issues within the justice system and stated that the volunteering opportunity provided him with the chance to engage more positively with the justice system.

“I've never really thought about it before university, I never thought about prisons in general. I think I've never had to. So, it wasn't until I took that sociology paper and started realising how messed up this system was. When the opportunity came forward, I was like oh, okay, yeah, I need to do that 100%.”

Mary and Bryne's restorative and justice-based motivations and backgrounds as criminology students link to arguments made by Gilmour and Alessi's (2022), where prison volunteering was found to be a useful pedagogical tool that allowed students to critically engage with the justice system and challenge the take-for-granted punitive and retributive discourses around crime. Having equipped a more critical understanding of the justice system Mary and Bryne were able to bring their restorative justice beliefs into their volunteering experience and help cultivate alternative responses to how the justice system responds to and treats offenders.

“The induction didn't feel like any sort of training, it felt like fearmongering”- First Encounters with the Prison:

The prison volunteering experience constituted many of the participants' first introduction to a correctional facility and therefore, the prison environment emerged as a novel and unfamiliar territory. The participants discussed their initial encounters and emotions as they embarked on their first day in the prison and undertook the prison induction. As explored in the previous section,

volunteers embarked on their journey driven by altruistic aspirations to contribute and aid inmates in various ways, along with their intentions to foster a restorative justice mindset to overcome prevailing punitive rhetoric. However, these aspirations came to a head when volunteers encountered the prison induction, which introduces the volunteers to the safety and security regulations of their respective prison facilities.

Valuable guidance for new volunteers

Participants provided differing opinions on whether their corrections-led induction adequately prepared them for their roles within the prison. Many of the volunteers in the current study had no prior experience working in a prison and therefore had little knowledge about how the prison culture operates. The induction is therefore often the first-place volunteers receive information about how the prison environment and culture operate. The information given to volunteers in the induction is typically from the perspective of custodial staff who maintain the tight security of the prison (King, 2009). As such, some of the participants did discuss learning new and useful bits of information and advice about how to maintain their safety. One such example was the advice the volunteers received about appropriate dress, which specifically included not wearing gang-affiliated colours and revealing clothing that could jeopardise the volunteers' safety. As Belinda explains,

“But then there were also things like not wearing gang colours or not wearing your jewellery and your wedding ring, or not going in with your chest showing or wearing short shorts which should be common sense. But I thought stuff like that was really good.”

Lorraine discussed learning about what materials volunteers were not advised to bring into the prison, which may be conventional materials needed for their programs such as booklets and pens. For example, Lorraine learned that common items like certain spring pens were banned as they could be used as tattoo and flame implements. Lorraine remarked about how such pieces of information would have never crossed her mind, due to her inexperience with such an environment.

“Then the induction was very intense, and you probably did that, did they tell you that you mustn't wear blue, and you mustn't wear yellow and all of that.... And about the little spiral thing inside the pen? So that the men can't take it out and put it in the light bulb and light their marijuana cigarettes....I never thought of these things, it's extraordinary.”

For volunteers, especially those new to the prison environment, the induction can provide useful knowledge from the perspective of staff who deal with security and safety daily. The type of information (dress attire, prohibited material, and giving out personal information), allowed the volunteers to feel somewhat safer as they were more informed.

Anxiety, fear, and intimidation- Volunteers' perceptions of the prison induction

A frequent sentiment that arose from discussions around the volunteer's introduction into the prison environment, was the perception that the inductions were often intense and unnecessarily anxiety provoking. As one example, Bryne described the sessions as a fear-mongering experience, rather than an informative session for new volunteers.

“I mean, the induction didn't feel like any sort of training, it felt like fearmongering, I'll be honest, you know, we were shown the wall of weapons and stuff that prisoners had made and told stories about all these ways that prisoners can create power over you. It very much felt like what not to do, instead of how to navigate this new thing that you're coming into.”

Another participant, Belinda furthered discussions regarding the intensity of the content covered during the induction process. According to Belinda, the sessions predominantly focused on worst-case scenarios, involving instructing the volunteers on how to handle prison-wide lockdowns, hostage situations, and other various security and safety threats. As a first-time prison volunteer, Belinda's introduction into the prison, left her feeling notably more anxious about her role.

“I mean, they were very worst-case scenarios. You know, it was very much about now, if you're held hostage, and don't let them manipulate you, and if someone weird requests you on Facebook, report it, I just was like, wow...So I did feel like it [the induction] prepared me, but it probably made me a bit more anxious than I needed to be.”

Additionally, Belinda shared how members of her team also experienced amplified anxiety following their inductions. The content discussed during the sessions, along with the warnings issued by prison staff, prompted many to reconsider their decisions to continue as prison volunteers.

“But I know some of the others [the other volunteers] that have been in those sessions kind of came out of it going “Do I want to do this? I'm not sure.” And particularly some of the

volunteers who had young children and stuff, they were like, “Oh, I need to have another conversation with my husband about this, because it’s not just me at risk.”

For India, the induction confronted her with the rigorous rules and regulations of the prison environment, which the volunteers had to adhere to for their safety. For India, when she was a first-time prison volunteer, the strict nature of the prison environment stood in stark contrast to any other environment she had worked in before.

“Different, that’s how I would explain it [the prison]. Nothing I think can prepare you for going to prison. It’s very, obviously strict. There are rules that you wouldn’t even dream of being rules in any other workplace environment. Like with staples, you’re not allowed staples out because it could disrupt the electronic locking gates. And you know, a lot of glue sticks, because they could sniff the glue, and you’re not allowed to wear red, yellow, or blue, because you know it’s gang memorabilia.”

Lorraine, while she acknowledged that the inductions were intense, discussed her background as a previous psychiatric nurse which allowed her to feel more comfortable going into this role as she drew parallels between her time looking after mentally ill patients, and approaching her prison work.

“Because I used to nurse at Blue Lake City hospital when I was at university and I nursed mentally ill people, this is in the 60s... The way you nurse mentally ill people and the way you look after people in a prison are very similar...so, I wasn’t afraid.”

For new volunteers, who had never encountered the strict control-oriented and risk-averse prison world, the induction was a significant experience where some became nervous and overwhelmed heading into their roles. While the induction did leave some wondering whether this role was right for them, the volunteers’ discussed learning more about the prison world as they developed into their roles over time, as well as leaning on more experienced volunteers for guidance. As Bryne discusses below, leaning on the support and advice from more experienced volunteers who were able to provide Bryne with a more neutral view of prison.

“The other volunteers saved my life. When she [another volunteer] gave me the lowdown as we were driving out, I felt so much more confident. I don't think I would have felt nearly as

confident and oh god just trying to start the conversation and stuff, that would have been a nightmare. It is so valuable to have someone that knows the lowdown.”

“You are walking into a totally different culture”- A Clashing of Cultures:

The volunteers’ conversations and the emotions which arose from navigating the confronting induction experience, reveal a juxtaposition between the worldview and culture of the prison, and the volunteers. The prison, with its control-oriented and security-focused approach, becomes evident for the volunteers during the inductions, which contradicts the volunteers’ aspirations to foster a more compassionate, rehabilitative, and community-oriented ethos into their work. This chapter will end by delving deeper into this clashing of cultures and worldviews and analyse the two contrasting worldviews of the prison institution, and the volunteers.

Prison Management: The Prioritisation of Control and Security

As stated before, the volunteers' sentiments around the intensity of the inductions, introduce tensions between the worldviews of the volunteers, as well as the correctional institutions they worked within. Given that most prisons operate under high levels of security, the primary objective of prison staff is to maintain strict control and ensure the safety of inmates, staff, and visitors, including volunteers (Craig, 2004; Wright & Bronstein, 2007). To this end, any individual entering the prison is required to adhere to the institutions’ stringent rules and regulations, which necessitates the completion of an induction process which is designed to articulate the importance of maintaining the control and security of the prison (Craig, 2004; Wright & Bronstein, 2007). During the induction sessions, volunteers are educated about various aspects of the prison environment and information specific to keeping themselves safe.

“They [Corrections] said, you've got to remember a lot the inmates can be very manipulative, and they know how to work you. So, you must be really careful about what you say.”
(Belinda)

Furthermore, the emphasis on security during the induction process is additionally driven by Corrections’ concerns regarding outside partnerships. Previous literature has documented the cautiousness exhibited by correctional facilities in granting access to community volunteers who may lack familiarity with prison operations (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Dewey et al., 2021; Just Speak,

2014). The lack of familiarity with the rigorous security measures upheld by prison staff daily can contribute to the perception that volunteers may place additional pressure on staff to ensure their safety (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Dewey et al., 2021). Consequently, the induction process must serve as a mechanism through which prison staff can communicate their security concerns and equip volunteers with the necessary knowledge to navigate the security protocols of the respective prisons. However, as evidenced by the participants' perception of the inductions, the induction process frequently stood in stark contrast to the volunteers' aspirations of cultivating a more humane and relaxed environment. Belinda exemplifies these tensions below, where a guard's earlier caution regarding manipulative inmates and the practice of creating emotional distance with the inmates, clashed with the volunteers' desired approach towards the inmates.

“My biggest fear was I wanted to be able to be respectful to them. I really hoped that someone didn't ask me a question that I went, I'm not going to answer that. I was worried that they'd say, well, so where do you live? What do you do? And it's like, how am I going to make conversation because you got to remember as a volunteer, I think we are naturally kind people, so I wouldn't go in there and just be like, "No, I'm not answering that." I just was really concerned because I wanted to be respectful.” (Belinda)

Inter-Organisational Friction: The Volunteers' Perspective

The emphasis on security and control that is reflected in the design and purpose of the induction produces conflicts with the goals, aspirations, and expectations of volunteers. Correctional institutions are increasingly sourcing programs and services via community volunteers (Craig, 2004; Wright & Bronstein, 2007; Abrams et al., 2016; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). However, such outside groups may not share the same control-oriented and security approach as the prison. Sinclair (2017) discusses a ‘clash of cultures which results between the prison, which is driven by risk-aversion and control, and volunteers, who are working to provide rehabilitative services that reflect a humanised and community approach. This clash of cultures results in tension between the goals, priorities, and structures of the volunteers and the prison, manifested in the clash between the volunteers' altruistic aspirations, and the confrontational and intense prison culture. According to Craig (2004), the involvement of external service providers such as community volunteers can exacerbate existing tensions or a “clash of cultures” between control-oriented prisons, and the more humanising goals of volunteers.

“This is the stuff that will stick with me”- Unveiling the bright side of volunteering

As illustrated above, the volunteers encountered a confronting introduction to the prison environment. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the volunteers frequently described their overall time as prison volunteers as an immensely positive and transformative journey in their lives.

“They [the inmates] were amazing. Some of them were really talented, like, incredibly talented. I remember tearing up hearing one of their poems. The most rewarding thing was probably doing something that made their day or just kind of gave them something to look forward to.” (Bryne)

“Just watching the less confident members of the group progress. In not only their abilities in creative writing, but their confidence was a massive thing for me.” (India)

Conclusion:

In summary, this chapter aimed to profile the volunteers who participated in the current study. The focus was on their backgrounds, detailing how they became prison volunteers, as well as the reasons behind their decision to take on such a role. This was to provide a profile of prison volunteers that was specific to a New Zealand context. The volunteers came into their prison role through university courses or their affiliations with volunteer-based non-profit organisations. I drew on the Functional Approach of volunteer motivations (Clary et al., 1998), as well as research on volunteers and ex-sex offenders (Lowe et al., 2019) to identify and conceptualise the diverse motivations of the participants. The volunteers in this study were driven by altruistic desires to aid their communities, develop career-based experience and skills, and the desire to apply their beliefs and values related to restorative justice principles. Recognising the various factors that attract individuals to volunteer in prisons provides a more comprehensive understanding of why individuals choose to engage in prison volunteer initiatives. While some participants acknowledged the valuable advice provided during the induction sessions, many of them highlighted the intense and confrontational nature of the prison environment. For many of the volunteers, stepping into the prison for the first time, these inductions triggered feelings of unease and anxiety as they were presented with the rigorous prison rules and potential dangers in the role. Through the conversations, it became evident that their motivations and desires for engaging in volunteering created tensions as they entered this new environment. These tensions stemmed from the contrasting worldviews between the prison, which adopts a control-

oriented and security-driven approach, as explicitly manifested during the inductions, and the volunteers, who aspired to instil a humanising and rehabilitative ethos into their work. Navigating the confrontational and unfamiliar environment was made easier by leaning on more experienced volunteers for guidance and support. The following chapter moves into exploring the benefits of prison volunteer work.

Chapter Five: “The prisoners look forward to seeing someone on the outside, especially someone that doesn’t look at them as prisoners”- Exploring the Benefits of Prison Volunteering

This chapter explores the participants’ perception of the beneficial impacts of their programs on themselves and the inmates they worked with. This chapter identifies personal benefits for the volunteers, including career development and undergoing experiential and transformative learning which resulted in a shift of previously held beliefs and attitudes about inmates, offending, and the prison system. Volunteers also recognise mental health and well-being benefits for inmates. Educational opportunities are discussed, with volunteers adopting critical and dialogic pedagogies to create equitable and trusting classroom environments. The volunteers’ approach differs from conventional hierarchical and treatment-focused settings in corrections. I argued that the volunteers’ independence from bureaucratic and evidence-based requirements allows for a more holistic, humanised, and non-hierarchical program delivery, which I argue underscores the benefits that are discussed throughout this chapter.

Benefits Experienced by the Volunteers:

This section explores the benefits that prison volunteering provided for the volunteers themselves. The participants identified career-related benefits and discussed undergoing experiential and transformative learning which resulted in a shift in pre-existing beliefs and attitudes regarding inmates and the prison system.

Career development and experiential learning

Three of the participants, Bryne, Mary, and India, discussed their newfound career interests within corrections or the justice system in some capacity that emerged during their volunteering. Bryne expressed gaining valuable career experience whilst volunteering with inmates. As a university student preparing to embark on their professional journey, Bryne found inspiration working with inmates and expressed a desire to pursue similar endeavours in the future.

“I intend on going back and working with corrections in some form. At some point, I want to do psychology and stuff. I am hoping to help them [the prisoners] in that kind of way.”

Mary began her volunteering experience as a university student and, like Bryne, developed an interest in working with inmates in some capacity in the future. Mary discussed how volunteering and working with inmates led her to transition into a permanent position within the corrections department.

“Due to what I was doing volunteer-wise, it really did push me to begin working with corrections.”

Several studies have highlighted the career development opportunities that arise through volunteering, particularly for university students (Khasanzyanova, 2017; Chaddha & Raj, 2016). Research demonstrates that volunteering assists students in transitioning from tertiary study to the workforce by allowing them to develop crucial career skills and interests within their communities (Matthews et al., 2009; Khasanzyanova, 2017; Chaddha & Raj, 2016; Evans & Yusof, 2023). Student volunteerism is contextualised within the university environment where MacNeela and Gannon (2013, pp. 430) argue, “developmental concerns and ease of access to engagement opportunities coincide.” As students navigate through various significant life transitions, the university serves as a critical platform for addressing development issues related to academic achievement and self-exploration (MacNeela & Gannon, 2013; Williamson et al., 2017). During this phase, students actively seek to enhance their repertoire of career skills and cultivate a sense of self as they prepare for future careers and life beyond university (MacNeela & Gannon, 2013; Williamson et al., 2017). Within the university environment, numerous opportunities for civic engagement arise, providing students with ample avenues to develop their career interests, skills, and a sense of identity through volunteer-based work (MacNeela & Gannon, 2013).

Volunteering can also provide valuable experiential learning opportunities. According to MacNeela and Gannon (2013, pp. 409), student-based volunteering is predicated on “learning by doing” where students can learn through the process of hands-on experience and reflection. Gilmour and Alessi (2022) demonstrate experiential learning among criminology students volunteering in a prison setting. Through the students' work with inmates, they were able to apply their criminological studies in a real-world setting and reflect through the interviews about their experiences. The current study also found examples of participants, such as India, experiencing experiential learning through their volunteering.

Volunteering offers individuals opportunities to explore new interests and potential career pathways within Corrections or the justice sector at large, as demonstrated by the experiences of Bryne and Mary. Prison volunteerism can open new avenues and career trajectories that may ultimately lead to employment in these fields, while simultaneously providing valuable experiential learning and equipping individuals with the relevant skills needed (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022). The potential for students to gain such beneficial career-related advantages and learning experiences serves as a strong motivation for their involvement in prison volunteerism (Lowe et al., 2019; Clary et al., 1998; Widjaja, 2010). Despite the previously mentioned benefits and the positive impacts of students volunteering on communities, it is argued that student-aged volunteers are underutilised in the volunteer sector (Williamson et al., 2017). Experiential learning extended beyond university student volunteers, as other participants also reported experiencing a growth in empathy and understanding towards inmates and a transformation of their pre-existing beliefs.

“The exposure to the inmates was a massive thing for me, I've developed a lot of patience and openness” – A transformation of beliefs

Experiential learning transformed participants' perspectives and beliefs, particularly regarding inmates, criminality, and the criminal justice system. Many participants discussed, through working closely with the inmates over several weeks, months, to even years, becoming well versed in their stories and beginning to develop a greater understanding of their positions and the broader contexts behind their offending. Volunteers often describe volunteering as an eye-opening experience, where they begin to become aware of the marginalisation of many inmates and the complexities around their offending (Duncan & Balbar, 2008). Belinda provides an example where she began to unpick the broader structural reasons that contribute to offending and explicitly links this change with her exposure to inmates which occurred through volunteering.

“When I came out of it, I had a very different idea of what people in prison are like, you know, to when if someone had asked me years ago what I thought about people in prison, my idea of that very much changed after talking to a lot of these guys....It's because you realise there's a whole lot more to the story than someone's just bad, and did a bad crime. But there's a lot more to that. And you see that just by getting exposed to these people.”

The current participants also discussed notable shifts in their beliefs about the justice system and began to offer critiques of the effectiveness of the prison institution. India discusses below how she

became aware of the little support inmates receive in achieving successful reintegration into the community, whilst Bryne demonstrates a more abolitionist perspective which further developed during their exposure to the prison.

“The most frustrating thing for me was becoming aware through discussions with the inmates, how little they're supported once they get out of prison. One of the guys was saying how you can get a maximum I think it's like, \$350. And you literally just get put on a bus to wherever you want. Like, how do you get a job? How do you pay more than two weeks' rent and living expenses? And then how do you become employed? I can see why these guys re-offend. They don't know anything else and aren't able to support themselves if they didn't have a family. (India)

“Well, personally, I think there just shouldn't be a prison system at all.” (Bryne)

Through the experiential learning process, and their reflections on their volunteering experiences, volunteers can adopt a more humanising perspective, seeing inmates beyond their criminal offending and developing a more compassionate and tolerant outlook (Duncan & Balbar, 2008; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015; Tewksbury & Dabney, 2004; Loughnan, 2022). The increased knowledge of the inmates' life stories, and reasons behind their offending, generated a greater level of compassion towards the inmates, with the volunteers realising many of them had been victims themselves, at some point in their lives. Additionally, the volunteers were able to critically analyse their assumptions about inmates and offending, as well as to critique current rhetoric towards inmates and the practices of correctional institutions (Loughnan, 2022). Gilmour and Alessi (2022) argue that volunteering has the potential to transform the status quo of the existence of our prison systems and allow them to make critiques against such systems.

Additionally, Transformative Learning Theory provides a framework to understand why volunteers undergo such changes in their perspectives and beliefs of both the inmates and the prison system at large. This theory is defined as, “a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings and actions” (Kitchenham, 2008, pp. 104). Transformative learning challenges individuals' ingrained assumptions and constructions of the world, leading them to critically examine and imagine alternative possibilities (Hinck et al., 2019). This transformative process occurs when individuals draw from their situational context and generate new ideas and realities (Hicks, 2012). Critical reflection is crucial for individuals to undergo transformative learning, requiring individuals to

reflect on the reasons behind their ideas and perceptions (Hicks, 2012). The volunteering experience and interactions with inmates and the prison system, allowed volunteers like Bryne, India, and Belinda to become critically aware of why they had previously adopted an individualistic view of criminality.

Hinck et al., (2019) observed transformational learning taking place among students engaging in prison volunteerism, where students worked with inmates for two semesters. Through these interactions, students underwent a shift in their perception of inmates, moving away from viewing them as the criminal “other” to adopting a more humane understanding. Arthur & Valentine (2018) also describe how volunteering allowed students to challenge their stereotypical assumptions about prisoners, allowing them to recognise prisoners as individuals who face wider social issues and challenges. The negative conceptions of inmates often perpetuated through media, culture, and politics (Cullen & Fisher, 2000), did not align with the students’ positive experiences and interactions with the inmates. The constructed ideas and othering of prisoners as merely “bad people” justify more punitive and less civilised treatment (Wright & Bronstein, 2008; Bidwell & Polley, 2023). The volunteers in the current study denounced the negative labels and language attached to inmates, specifically the notion of criminals as only ‘bad people,’ as exemplified by Mary and Bryne below:

“And the people in there, they're not necessarily just bad people, some of them. But at least for the people we encountered, there's a whole lot more to that. It's more complicated than just being able to say, "Oh, they're a bad person." You know, there's more to that. And just I think, being able to go on there and see that and work with them and just talk to them and be exposed to that.” (Bryne)

“Yeah, it's just realising like, oh, criminals aren't necessarily criminals because they are bad people. “(Mary)

Perceived Benefits of Volunteer Work for Inmates: Insights from Volunteers:

Volunteering benefits both individuals and the communities they serve, which MacNeela and Gannon (2013) describe as a ‘bidirectional dynamic’. The volunteers identified perceived benefits to the inmates they worked with. Two themes emerged: positive impact on inmates’ mental health and

well-being and the provision of educational opportunities. It was found that the volunteers adopted more critical and dialogic pedagogies, contrasting the hierarchical, treatment-based, and alienating environments typical within Correctional programs. The volunteers' discussions reveal the different spaces of the neoliberal prison where programs are constrained by bureaucratic and evidence-based demands, while volunteers have more freedom in how they can approach their programs which I argue, underscores many of the benefits the volunteers discussed.

Improvement in mental health and well-being:

Prisons can have negative effects on inmates' mental health due to the hostile and institutionalising nature of the prison environment, additionally, a large proportion of inmates have encountered many adverse life experiences and as a result, come to prison with complex mental health needs (Mckenna et al., 2021; Monasterio et al., 2020). Mental health services within the prison system are extremely strained and inadequate (Mckenna et al., 2021), however, volunteers can provide care and programs that go beyond the standardised correctional interventions (Kjellstrand et al., 2022). The current participants perceived that their programs benefitted inmates' mental health and well-being by providing them with safe spaces for an emotional outlet, connecting inmates with the community, and offering a positive break from regimented prison life.

Providing inmates with safe emotional outlets

Many of the volunteers in the current study discussed their perception that their programs provided inmates with safe, non-judgmental, and positive spaces outside of the harsh environment of their cells. Through the provision of such spaces, in different ways, the inmates were able to express themselves and vent their emotions while also taking part in a positive activity. Bryne discussed how their creative writing program provided the inmates with a creative medium, which allowed them to outlet their emotions through their writing and express the complexities of their upbringings and time in jail, all while learning practical writing skills.

“From what I've seen, it [the program] seems to give people a good outlet. You know, the writing gives people a really good outlet, and I think, interacting with volunteers and being humanized. I think that's a big thing. I think that gives people hope, and you know, something else to keep them going. I mean, all they see when they're in prison is punishment, right? There are, like some aspects of rehabilitation, but they don't get something like this. I think it's so important, not just for reducing recidivism, but improving mental health.”

India additionally believed the writing program had a healing effect, as it allowed the inmates to open up in a way that was comfortable and effective for them, while also receiving validation from the volunteers for their work. India believed this ability to share and heal is not always doable within the prison environment, where the men's emotional openness may make them appear vulnerable and judged by other inmates.

“I think our program, for example, was rehabilitative in the sense that it allowed the men to express themselves freely, not only through creative writing but in like class discussions. It was a non-judgmental, safe space, so they could say anything that they wanted. I think, allowed them to, like heal and express a lot of things that they couldn't in a prison environment outside of the program's building.”

Lorraine's book club provided an opportunity for incarcerated men to engage in healthy debates and discussions about the books they read. For Lorraine, the book club provided an alternative and healthy way for inmates to communicate and resolve their differences.

“So, there's a good discussion, it's not angry discussion, which I imagine happens a lot in the prison. Although, I mean, I never saw it, but we could sit there and discuss it. And this guy thinks x, and this guy thinks y. And we hear all the sides. And then this guy thinks, oh, I think he's right. And it allows good discussion among everybody, based on the book that we're reading.”

The volunteers' perceptions that their programs provided specific well-being-based benefits for the inmates are supported in research. Links have been made in research on the value of art-based therapy in a prison setting in producing well-being-related benefits for inmates. Gussak (2007) found that art sessions in prison resulted in inmates experiencing decreased levels of depression, mood improvement, more regulated sleeping patterns, and increased socialisation with peers. For inmates, participating in creative programs can alleviate mental and emotional disorders and allow the inmates to externalise their feelings in a creative and positive medium (Farley, 2022) as India and Bryne discussed above with the creative writing program. Research on communal cooking classes with inmates, such as GBB's Prison Bake program, can create beneficial well-being outcomes for inmates such as improving self-esteem and developing a more pro-social identity (Parsons, 2017). Moreover, existing research supports the volunteers' perceptions that their programs provide safe spaces for inmates to vent and receive sustained prosocial support which can counterbalance the

negative prison environment (Schuhmann et al., 2018). Inmates often feel they cannot confide in other inmates due to perceived weakness and fear of violence, or staff who are perceived as untrustworthy (Schuhmann et al., 2018). Therefore, volunteers offer inmates rare opportunities to have conversations with individuals who are not connected to the harshness of traditional prison life (Schuhmann et al., 2019; Dewey et al., 2021).

Additionally, the theoretical concept of social capital has also been used to explain the positive links between prison volunteerism and inmate mental health (Schuhmann et al., 2018). The involvement and participation in social groups, such as the inmates' involvement in creative and communal programs within the prison can produce positive consequences such as improved well-being for the inmates (Gussak, 2007; Farley, 2022). Criminological research has also proposed that the concept of social capital underpins the mental health benefits experienced by inmates and provided by volunteers and is a critical factor in desistance (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Fox, 2015). The engagement of inmates in programs and services provided by community volunteers offers opportunities to form prosocial relationships, skills, and bonds, which are all argued to be crucial factors in the development of social capital and thus crime desistance (Portes 1998; Schuhmann et al., 2018; Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Fox, 2015).

Providing a connective bridge to the community

Another identified benefit from the current participants concerning inmate mental health and well-being was the theme of connection. Specifically, the volunteers discussed how their programs helped connect inmates with the outside community, and with each other as they collaborated on tasks. India provides an example where the inmates not only formed connections with each other but also gained a sense of connection to life outside of prison through the volunteers.

“Also, just like them being able to form connections with other inmates from different securities³, and also to be able to see what we as volunteers were doing with our lives outside the prison is probably quite good exposure for them.” (India)

³ Inmates with different security classifications are accommodated in separate areas of the prison (Department of Corrections, 2021). The programmes building where India's class takes place allows members from different areas of the prison to interact.

Mary recognised the potential for inmates to engage in positive socialisation and develop crucial interpersonal skills through interactions with individuals outside their fellow inmates and corrections staff.

“And also, just like any of the volunteers, again, it's bringing people in from the outside. So, you're getting that socialization factor. And you're bringing in what's happening in the outside world.”

The significance of connection to others, whether it be with other inmates or community members, cannot be understated. Punishment via incarceration involves separating criminals from the broader society (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Such isolation has severe negative implications for inmates as it removes them from closer support networks such as family and friends (Cochran & Mears, 2013). In instances where visits by family and friends are not possible, volunteers can then provide the missing link with the community and provide opportunities to form strong social bonds with those potentially excluded from general visitations (Duwe & Johnson, 2016). Connection through volunteers is significant as inmates who are socially isolated from their communities are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes such as self-harm and suicide during their incarceration, as well as long-lasting effects that can carry over to life after release (Cochran & Mears, 2021; Siennick et al, 2013).

Volunteers and their programs can counteract the negative effects associated with the isolating prison environment, by providing connective links with the community (Kjellstrand et al., 2022).

Volunteer-led programs and initiatives allow inmates to engage in projects which build community connections. For example, men from Otago Corrections Facility learn to knit with volunteers where items knitted by the inmates, are then donated to a night shelter in Dunedin (Arts Access Aotearoa, 2019). Current participants Alice and Belinda through Good Bitches teach baking to inmates, which again is donated. These community-based initiatives which inmates allowed the inmates to give back to their communities and, as argued by Kort-Butler and Malone (2015), provide vital links between inmates, community, and community resources. Abrams et al., (2016) argue that providing inmates with the opportunities to engage in community projects, can foster a culture of purpose as well as support constructive personal and community endeavours.

A positive break from the regimented routines of prison life

Another repeated theme was that the volunteers believed their programs benefited the inmates as they provided them with a positive break from the highly structured and regimented nature of prison life. The volunteer programs were often more creative, less formal, and not treatment focused, and provided the inmates with a more relaxed environment. Alice discussed how the Prison Bake program gave the prisoners a positive and constructive experience within their often highly regimented routines.

“Having us coming in and having a bit of a giggle and doing something quite different that had a positive focus made a difference to them. And it gave them a bit of lightness amongst everything else.”

Alice discussed how her participants expressed gratitude for the volunteers providing them with a more normalised, less formal, and positive experience. The inmates Alice worked with often described the overwhelming nature of prison life, and for them, the programs were a chance to break away from the toils of their everyday routine.

“One of the guys in there was telling me how for him, it was just so nice to have something like normalised but also positive....because there's nothing planned, they just kind of mope around the villas, and often the others are whining or complaining about the way that their life is, but then it just sometimes it's a bit overwhelming. And so having us coming in and having a bit of a giggle and doing something quite different that had a positive focus made a difference to them.”

Volunteer programs are less constrained by prison bureaucracy and deficit-focused programs and instead can experiment with innovative and less formal programs, that prisons are often unable to implement due to their risk-averse culture, as Sinclair (2017, pp. 8) argues, can “add a local flavour to prison life so that it reflects its community rather than just conforming to interpersonal national standards.” However, as the prison’s primary focus is control and security, inmates are subjected to a highly regimented routine is enforced which deprives inmates of autonomy (Craig, S. 2004; Johnson & Dobrzanska, 2005; Sinha, 2010). This regimented routine deprives inmates of autonomy, making it challenging for them to adjust (Sinha, 2010). Additionally, prison-based programs are constricted by actuarial justice demands and therefore have less room to experiment with their programs, as volunteers can do.

Education and Opportunities for Change:

Volunteers are often responsible for aiding in the provision of educational and skill-based programs to supplement the programs offered by the Department of Corrections (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Providing these education opportunities is an important endeavour as studies show that education amongst prisoners can result in higher post-prison employment levels and contribute to lower recidivism rates (Just Speak, 2014). Mary believed her tutoring program gave inmates more opportunities to gain qualifications and acquire academic skills, which may otherwise have been restricted due to current pressures on the Department of Corrections.

“And I guess just giving them opportunities they wouldn’t necessarily get, especially in the education side of things....If they've got NCEA level one at the end of it, it's a qualification that can get them a job. And when they're learning new skills, like again, that's stuff they may not have, and it's positive towards giving them jobs. If it gives them a job, they're less likely to have to resort to theft.”

Mary’s remarks draw attention to the crucial role that volunteers play in providing educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals. International research has shown that correctional education can lead to positive changes in inmate behaviour, improved self-esteem, and reduced recidivism rates, where in-prison education is linked to higher post-release employment rates which also contributes to reductions in recidivism (Vandala, 2019). Within a New Zealand- specific context, a large proportion of inmates arrive in prison with low levels of educational attainment where an estimated sixty percent of prisoners in New Zealand have literacy and numeracy skills below NCEA level one (Banks, 2017). This lack of educational attainment makes it difficult for inmates to acquire the prosocial and workplace skills necessary for successful reintegration into society (Gillies et al., 2014). The low literacy and numeracy rates amongst the New Zealand prison population can limit their ability to effectively participate in a knowledge-based society (Moriarity, 2014). Furthermore, there may be a shortage of actual educational programs available to inmates, as Mary points out. In New Zealand, neoliberal restructurings from the 1980s resulted in a reduction of prisoners’ access to educational programs and training (Devine, 2006) During this period, there was an emphasis on programs geared towards enhancing public safety (Devine, 2006). These challenges, combined with the already poor educational attainment of many inmates, can erode the potential for successful rehabilitation. However, volunteers can offer additional educational programs that

correctional facilities may not be able to do due to costs and resource constraints (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015).

Engaging in critical pedagogy

Bryne discusses the importance of providing the inmates with educational opportunities, acknowledging however, that many of the inmates either did not have access to schooling or struggled with the traditional education pedagogy. Bryne comments on the volunteers' ability to employ less traditional and alternative ways to run their programs, which could diverge from the structures used in the Corrections programs.

“It gives them these life skills. And I suppose a lot of them probably had issues with the education system. Because there's a very kind of specific pedagogy that goes on with that, whereas our approach was quite flexible, and creative and kind of group focused, which I think is probably better.”

In New Zealand, mainstream education is typically based on a “transactional process” that employs didactic teaching practices, where the teacher holds all the knowledge and the students are passive receivers (Ladkin, 2017; McInerney, 2009). This didactic teaching model creates power imbalances within the classroom, where the students are positioned as powerless, while the teacher is powerful (Ladkin, 2017). Consequently, mainstream education creates a context in which some students experience the classroom environment negatively and can become alienated from education (Little & Warr, 2022; McInerney, 2009). For Māori, who make up a significant portion of the prison population (Department of Corrections, 2018), New Zealand's Eurocentric education pedagogy reflects patterns of domination and subordination, which Bishop (2003) argues results in higher non-participation rates amongst inmates in the education system. Many inmates have low levels of educational attainment before entering prison due to their alienation from mainstream education (Little & Warr, 2022). However, it is argued here that volunteers can approach their programs using non-hierarchical methods of teaching which emphasises a dialogic pedagogy.

The volunteers in this study embraced critical teaching pedagogy, allowing them to approach education beyond the confines of the prison's institutional requirements. According to scholar Freire in his work 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed,' the concept of critical pedagogy examines the possibilities of education for transforming unjust social relations and power dynamics (Freire, 2000; McInerney,

2009). Freire opposes the ‘didactic’ teaching process within mainstream education in which students are positioned as passive knowledge receivers which in turn works to mirror oppressive power relations (Freire, 2000). Therefore, Freire argues that education should involve ‘dialogic’ learning whereby the students’ become constructors of knowledge which creates a more levelled power relation between student and teacher (Freire, 2000; McInerney, 2009; Little & Warr, 2022). The participants in the current study displayed using more dialogic teaching when they approached their work with inmates, aligning with the values of Freire (2000) and critical pedagogy. Alice provides a clear example of her team’s intentions to ensure they were not creating a typical hierarchical teaching environment.

“Kind of a bit more mentoring than teaching in some ways. So, it wasn't us standing at the front of a school commercial kitchen type situation, teaching them it was, yeah, us hanging out in the kitchen in the villa, showing them how to do stuff and just letting them figure it out, and then help them when they needed it.”

Belinda as well, also part of Good Bitches, described this more hands-off approach which their team undertook, demonstrating how her organisation approached education differently, adopting a less hierarchical structure in which the teacher takes charge, and the student becomes the passive learner.

...But they'd kind of, watch what you are doing, and then you would get [the other inmates] it [the baking]. Then we would go through and tell them what we were going to bake. And we were very hands-off, so it was very much of them doing it and us just being there, and we would literally just sit on the kitchen bench, and just chat away to them.”

While the volunteers here did not assume typical teaching roles with inmates, except for Mary providing tutoring, they recognise the negative impacts of didactic and hierarchical teaching methods on inmates, during their incarceration and prior (Little & Warr, 2022; Bishop, 2003; McInerney, 2009). Programs within prisons often prioritise treatment-focused approaches, employing target-driven methods to meet literacy, numeracy, and vocational qualification goals for inmates (Little & Warr, 2022). Additionally, prison programs employ didactic teaching methods which involve addressing the causes of criminal behaviour, and involve an ‘expert of knowledge’ i.e., a psychologist, which involves hierarchical and transactional teaching structures (O’Malley, 2000). However, learning and engaging in programs within an institution where power and punishment hold sway over inmates, can hinder their engagement and participation (Little & Warr, 2022).

“I feel like a lot of the stuff that is offered is about fixing them, or is a real deficit kind of focus....but you [Corrections] don't provide the ingredients needed to do that other than these manualised programs. And people need to feel good about themselves and connected to other people. Like sometimes it just needs to be about doing something fun.” (Alice)

In contrast, volunteers approach their work from a more egalitarian standpoint, often being mindful of avoiding the teacher-student hierarchies which inmates have often had negative experiences with. As evident from the participants' responses above, volunteers tend to embrace a dialogic worldview, creating a more informal and collaborative classroom environment that may deviate from traditional didactic models. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the inmates expressed a greater sense of comfort with the volunteers who are distinct from authoritarian figures within the prison, and can foster greater levels of belonging, trust, and the establishment of an equitable space, allowing inmates to positively engage in their programs (Little & Warr, 2022). Volunteers can create these positive classroom environments as they have more freedom to experiment in their program as they are independent of the bureaucratic and actuarial constraints of the prison system. Moreover, this classroom setting can also help mitigate inmates' prior alienation and negative experiences with formal education outside of prison (Little & Warr, 2022; Bishop, 2003; McInerney, 2009).

Conclusion:

This chapter examined the participants' perceptions of the beneficial impacts of their programs on themselves and the inmates they worked with. The volunteers developed career aspirations, particularly among the university student volunteers, to work with inmates in some capacity. Through experiential learning, the volunteers gained a contextual understanding of the prisoners' lives, where inmates developed a strong understanding of the broader structural context behind many of the inmates offending which resulted in a transformation of their pre-existing beliefs about inmates, offending, and the criminal justice system. The perceived benefits for inmates included mental health and well-being improvements through providing safe spaces for expression, providing connections between inmates and the community, and respite from the regimented nature of prison life. The volunteers also recognised potential educational benefits and employed critical and dialogic pedagogies to create an equitable and trusting classroom setting. It is argued here the volunteers' discussions reveal the different spaces compared to the volunteering space which as independent

community members have more freedom to function beyond the ridged structures of the prison which underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work. As such, the volunteers' discussions indicate that the independence of volunteers from the prison institution is a critical factor in their effectiveness, as Sinclair (2017, pp.20) reminds us that “NGOs [volunteers] can be a game changer due to their ability to innovate and experiment in ways that prison staff and management find difficult, because of their core responsibilities and risk-averse culture.” The following chapter will now move on to explore the challenges faced by prison volunteers in New Zealand.

Chapter Six: “There’s so much bureaucracy and box ticking, it makes it almost impossible for you to do so much- The Challenges and Barriers Faced by Prison Volunteer Workers

The chapter examines the challenges faced by the participants in their roles as volunteers. Interpersonal challenges were identified, including negative interactions with inmates, balancing safety while building connections, and navigating the complex dynamic between volunteers and correctional staff. The chapter also explores the administrative barriers imposed by the correctional system, such as pressure to adhere to the strict rules of the prison, disruption to program consistency, and higher-level organisational challenges faced by volunteer leaders. This chapter argues that while the volunteers’ independence grants them some freedom from bureaucratic constraints, it can also give rise to significant tensions and barriers volunteers must navigate as they work within a total institution.

Interpersonal Challenges: Navigating Relationships with Inmates and Staff:

During their involvement in the prison system, participants engaged in discussions about facing interpersonal challenges while interacting with prison staff and inmates. Such challenges included volunteers dealing with negative interactions with inmates, balancing personal safety and connection with the inmates, and navigating their relationships with correctional staff. Tensions between custody-focused officers and human-service-oriented staff within correctional facilities can also extend to interactions between volunteers and prison staff. Volunteers with a therapeutic approach often contradict the key responsibilities and goals of custodial staff. Consequently, volunteers occasionally had to navigate prison staff’s unfavourable attitudes towards inmates and resistance towards the volunteers.

Keeping safe while keeping connected

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the participants recognised the importance of establishing connections between themselves and the inmates to foster trust, support, and strong rapport, and ultimately support positive engagement with their programs. However, the volunteers frequently discussed the difficulty of maintaining appropriate boundaries while still engaging in open and effective interactions with the inmates. During the volunteers’ induction, prison staff offered guidance on ensuring the volunteers’ safety, including avoiding excessive emotional involvement with the inmates and refraining from disclosing too much personal information. One participant,

India mentioned the challenge she encountered in finding the delicate balance between sharing information that could potentially compromise her safety, and under-sharing, which could hinder the development of connections with the inmates.

“Our relationship I think grew as the lessons went on. By the end of the program, I knew all of their full names and all of the crimes that they committed, and they knew aspects of my life, obviously not like where I live or that kind of thing. So yeah, it builds as you go. It's just finding that fine line between oversharing and not under sharing [to] the point where they don't feel like they have a connection.”

Belinda discussed the induction and the Correctional staff's warnings relating to oversharing with the inmates, which for her, portrayed the inmates as being highly manipulative. However, Belinda discussed finding it difficult to navigate the warnings of Corrections, with her desire to create a humanising and respectful relationship with the inmates.

“And the thing I probably took out of that [the induction] the most was about conversation, so they were very much you don't tell the prisoners anything about yourself. Corrections said, “You've got no idea who they know, on the outside.” They said, “You've got to remember a lot of these people that can be very manipulative.” So, my biggest fear was I wanted to be able to be respectful to them. Because you got to remember as a volunteer, I think we are naturally kind people, so I wouldn't go in there and just be like, “No, I'm not answering that.”

Previous research conducted in American contexts has highlighted the need for volunteers to remain on a “cognitive guard,” requiring them to maintain mental alertness and caution while providing adequate rehabilitative services and forming genuine connections with the inmates (Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). The current participants also discussed the difficulty in maintaining this cognitive guard, which was encouraged during their induction, however, the volunteers also recognised the importance of establishing connections with inmates.

“You need to be an empath, Yeah, to a degree, though, because you can't be sympathetic that, you know, you let your guard down.” (Mary)

The difficulties encountered by the volunteers in this context can also be attributed to the larger conflicts between the prison's worldview, and environment, and the perspectives of the volunteers.

These conflicts have been exacerbated by and can be contextualised within the contemporary neoliberal prison environment, which has had a substantial influence on the dynamics between staff, prisoners, and volunteers. As discussed in the introduction, neoliberalism introduced the centralisation of competitive markets which also made its way into the prison institution which saw the rise of private prisons which are driven by target-and-profit approaches (Birch, 2015; Crewe et al., 2015). As a result, staff became increasingly burdened by increasing workloads, staff casualisation, and high turnover, as well as increasing pressures to adopt an authoritarian and punitive disciplinary style, all contributing to an increasingly strained prisoner-staff relationship (Crewe et al., 2015; Liebling & Arnold, 2012). Previous research on the perceptions of correctional officers in the United States argues that staff can perceive inmates as manipulative, arrogant, devious, or dangerous (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2022). Consequently, the content presented in the inductions might mirror the hostile culture and difficulties that staff must manage daily, where negative views towards inmates, can stem from the environmental and occupational pressures they face (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2022).

In contrast, volunteers bring a “therapeutic culture” and ethos, approach into programs, which is possible due to their separation from the bureaucratic and neoliberal prison system (Sinclair, 2017; Bennett & Shuker, 2010). This therapeutic culture necessitates volunteers to establish connections, approach inmates with openness and understanding, and actively engage in the programs with the inmates (Bennett & Shuker, 2010). However, creating a therapeutic culture is not always feasible or a priority for correctional staff within a risk-averse, neo-paternalistic, and ridged bureaucratic framework that the prison requires (Crewe et al., 2015; Crewe, 2012; Liebling & Arnold, 2012). Therefore, volunteers faced challenges in navigating the delicate balance between upholding a therapeutic and rehabilitative ethos that calls for connection, openness, and trust, while operating within an environment that emphasises authoritarian control, risk aversion, and a clear hierarchical distinction between staff and inmates (Liebling & Arnold, 2012).

Negative attitudes held by corrections staff

Some participants also expressed frustrations regarding the negative judgments staff occasionally held towards inmates. Mary disclosed that she experienced situations where staff engaged in negative discussions about the inmates, which made her uncomfortable since she believed it was not the position of the guards or the volunteers to pass judgement on the inmates.

“And the other frustration is sometimes to do with the attitudes of corrections staff. I had a couple who would just shit-talk the prisoners, and they go on about how awful they were. I just found that so frustrating because it's like, one, I wasn't asking for your opinion. And two, it's not up to us to judge them, that's not our job.”

As discussed earlier, the increasing influence of neoliberalist ideology, and punitive ideals within the Western prison system, has resulted in many flow-on effects such as increasing pressures on frontline correctional staff which in turn works to create hostile and tense relations between prisoner and staff members (Crewe et al., 2015; Crewe, 2012). The volunteers of the current study, at times, saw these tensions manifesting between the custodial officers and the inmates. The volunteers also discussed noticing clear distinctions between the prisoners' relationship with the programming staff, who are involved in managing the rehabilitative intervention programs and activities within the prison, and the frontline custodial staff. India explains the clear distinction she experienced between the prisoners and staff relationships below,

“The one thing I did notice though was that program staff were a lot warmer. That didn't necessarily mean that the custodial system was more resistant to me being here if that makes sense. It's just like a different demeanour. But I think that demeanour was probably just because of their relationship with the prisoners, rather than their relationship with us. “

Custodial staff play a primary role in the day-to-day operations of prisons, dealing with overall prison management and handling frontline emergencies (Misis et al., 2013). These responsibilities create a significantly stressful and challenging environment. Misis et al. (2013) argue that custodial-oriented officers tend to rely more on neo-paternalistic authority to manage inmates, while human service-oriented staff, such as program staff, prioritise rehabilitation as their main objective and adopt a counselling-oriented approach to their roles (Misis et al., 2013). Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this research, frontline correctional staff face increasing pressures that exacerbate the already demanding work environment. These pressures include meeting targets, coping with rising prison populations, and dealing with high staff turnover (Crewe et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2017; Just Speak, 2014; Misis et al., 2013). Logan et al. (2022) discusses how contextual factors, such as neoliberal restructurings and the prevalence of punitive penal ideology, can contribute to the development of resentment towards the inmate population. These contextual impacts affect the attitudes and treatment of inmates, as evidenced by the interactions observed by some of the participants. Due to the differences in correctional environments, custodial officers face unique

challenges, workplace stress, and contextual pressures that can shape their perspectives on and interactions with inmates. In contrast, program staff, who operate in a more relaxed environment, are not required to maintain strict order and control over inmates. Instead, they can encourage the adoption of a therapeutic approach within their programs, which can foster a more positive relationship with inmates.

Negative attitudes towards the volunteers

Additional to volunteers navigating challenges that arose with correctional staff and their approach to the inmates, volunteers also noted the negative perceptions guards sometimes held towards volunteers and the work they carried out within the prison. Belinda discussed that while she felt that the staff generally appreciated GBB and their work, she got the sense that some staff felt other volunteer groups were not as useful.

“I kind of got the impression from some of the guards that, you know, they'll go, "Oh, you know, you guys are great." Like, they sort of thought that us coming in and what we were doing was of value, but they thought what a lot of what the other volunteers were coming in and doing was a bit useless.”

The negative reception sometimes faced by volunteers from correctional staff can reflect broader conflicts between custody-oriented officers and human-service-oriented officers, such as the program staff (Misis et al., 2013). As previously explored, these two groups of staff have different correctional orientations and goals. Custodial staff are pressured to rely on punitive and punishment strategies when dealing with inmates, while human service-oriented staff adopts a more rehabilitative ethos (Misis et al., 2013). Research suggests that these divergent roles and orientations can lead to conflicts among staff (Misis et al. 2013; Johnson & Price, 1981). Johnson and Price (1981) describe these conflicts because of the contradictory tasks assigned to each group of staff, which creates treatment-custody conflicts.

As discussed throughout, volunteers approach their work with a rehabilitative and therapeutic ethos, similar to the human service-oriented positions of the program staff discussed in the current study. Such an ethos can clash with the control-oriented and punishment models prevalent in most prison institutions (Misis et al., 2013; Sinclair, 2017; Just Speak, 2014). Thus, while treatment-custody conflicts are characteristic between different groups of correctional staff (Misis et al., 2013; Johnson

& Price, 1981), they can also extend to volunteers, contributing to the clash of cultures which has also been evident in the previous chapters. Such conflicts are also further amplified by the hesitancy of prison staff to allow more “outsiders” into the prison environment, perceiving them as an additional security burden for staff who are already under significant pressure and stress (Arthur & Valentine, 2018). The perception of volunteers as added security burdens can lead to resentment and mistreatment of volunteers, further creating contention between the two groups (Arthur & Valentine, 2018). Research suggests that additionally, tensions can arise between volunteers and prison staff due to a lack of understanding from staff regarding the role and purpose of volunteers within the prison, which can further strain the relationship and lead to an undervaluing of the contributions of volunteers (Just Speak, 2014).

However, the volunteers also recognised the pressures placed on corrections staff namely discussing the staff shortages that are being faced across New Zealand prisons. Currently, the Department of Corrections is facing staff shortages with an estimated 850 more frontline staff needed across Aotearoa (Corlett, 2023). These shortages have seen disruptions to programs, visitations, and immense pressure on staff to keep the prison a safe environment (Corlett, 2023). Despite the above challenges and workplace pressures, the volunteers also often recounted the positive interactions with staff and the additional support they received throughout their time as a volunteer. Mary shared how the education and interventions team in the prison she volunteered at, were always eager to help support her program and ensured she and her work were validated.

“Yeah, like the entire education and intervention team were always positive about it. And they would be quite happy with you just doing anything. And they liked when you could take on more than one role or help more than one person.” (Mary)

Navigating Conflicting Environments: Beyond Interpersonal Challenges:

Looking beyond the interpersonal level, the participants discussed how the prison environment and its organisational structure created multiple barriers that hindered their work. These barriers encompassed pressure to comply with the strict rules and regulations, created restrictions around the implementation of their programs, disrupted the program’s consistency, as well as created issues related to communication and coordination with prison management.

‘Prisons are institutionalised, they live and thrive on rules and requirements’- Pressure to adhere to strict rules and policies

The participants discussed the strict administrative policies of the prisons they worked with, which they perceived to create barriers that impacted their programs. As explored throughout, the prison employs strict security and control regulations, which further developed as prisons became characterised by bureaucratic management practises (Crewe et al., 2015). The volunteers often discussed the difficulty and pressure they felt to adhere to the prisons’ many rules and regulations, as India demonstrates below.

“I think its [the prison] very different regarding adhering to all these different rules. I think, especially in a prison, you don't want to overstep or misstep, because that can have a lot more dire consequences, than, like if you were to just misstep in any other workplace.... You can't just walk from one building to another like you need to be radioed in, they need to know where you are. At every single point, you've got a panic alarm. Sign in, sign out all that kind of stuff. Every pen is accounted for. So yeah, I just think it's very systematic, it's very rules-based, and the rules are very different to any other environment.”

Alice, as someone who had experience working closely with prison administration to organise the ‘Prison Bake’ program, stated that the prison’s rules and requirements required a lot of ‘box ticking’ to ensure the program met the prison's safety requirements.

“Yeah. And ironically, all prisons are institutionalised, and you know, they live and thrive on rules and requirements. There are all these boxes, you must tick before you can even go in and like we've worked with them quite closely to make sure that we were setting the program up in a way that would keep everyone safe. “

Although Alice understood the importance of the bureaucratic ‘box ticking’ requirements necessary to sustain the Prison Bake program, these administrative tasks posed significant challenges for her and the program. Alice frequently mentioned the intricate coordination involved in maintaining multiple Prison Bake programs. Initially, Alice aspired to expand the program on a more national scale but had realised the complexity and impracticality of doing so within a part-time role. Alice also highlighted the prison’s insistence on following bureaucratic procedures, which dictated how programs would have to be implemented across the country. However, Alice explained that the

guidelines set by Corrections often contradicted what GBB believed would be most effective for the program, and GBB'S mission and program ethos.

“The [lack of] flexibility of the prisons can be an issue. I think the prisons think, “Oh, we just want volunteers on a weekday” which is really limiting for the program. I get where it comes from but if we actually want to run a program that’s best for the volunteers and the prisoners, then we need to do it at times that work best for them [the volunteers and inmates] not times that work best for bureaucracy.”

As shown by Alice’s example above, volunteers often struggle to establish their professional boundaries within the prison environment. The prison environment's stringent regulations, policies, and security prioritisation, limit the volunteers’ agency in determining their work conditions. This lack of control creates a disempowering element for the volunteers as oftentimes the ways in which the volunteers often want their program run, do not align with the prison’s strict managerial requirements. The lack of agency volunteers can have in establishing a work environment within the prison as a total institution can be seen also in India’s discussions around being warned that prison staff may regularly change the requirements for the volunteers’ access to the prison.

“I was warned that some people [corrections staff] don't want you here. Some people will make you take everything off when you go through the metal detector because they don't want you there. They said some people will have different rules which they can change whenever they want.

Mary also experienced difficulties in creating agency for the conditions of her tutoring. As one example, when Mary presented ideas to her prison supervisor on how to run her tutoring sessions and implement more programs, however, she was met with resistance.

“We had volunteers suggest programs and I was like, this sounds fantastic. I can see how this will work. I took it to my supervisor, and her answer was just no.”

Mary presents a more extreme case that highlights the challenges arising from the fact that volunteers, not being employees, lack some authority to shape their working environments according to their needs. In contrast to other participants who mainly operated in group settings with fellow volunteers, Mary frequently engaged in one-on-one interactions with inmates. Before assuming her

role, Mary was explicitly informed that Corrections would oversee the selection of inmates she would work with. She was specifically assured that inmates with prior sexual convictions would not be assigned to her. However, Mary shared an incident in which Corrections placed her with someone who had a history of sexual assault offences. As a result, an episode of inappropriate behaviour occurred on the part of the inmate which Mary had to report.

“But one of the biggest things they [Corrections] did was when I started, they said they'd never put me in a position with anyone who had a sexual assault conviction or were in high security, but then they got relaxed and they put me in a high-security cell with someone who had a sexual assault conviction....which led to there being a situation and that was like the last time I kind of wanted to do it [volunteering].”

Volunteers enter as separate entities which as discussed, can afford some freedoms for the volunteers in how they can approach their programs, however, they are still bound by the prison's requirements, including adherence to security rules and regulations, limitations on what materials they can bring in, and are restricted in what suggestions they can bring forth for their programs. Due to their independence where volunteers occupy a distinct position to that of prison employees, they have limited agency in asserting their professional boundaries.

“You just need to follow them [the staff's rules] and shut up. (India)

Mary's experiences highlight a more extreme example of the disempowering element that results from volunteers being independent of the prison. While the independence of volunteers brings its benefits, it can also limit their influence, control, and agency of their programs. This lack of agency results in disempowerment for volunteers working within a total institution where prison management retains significant decision-making power, and volunteers are subject to the policies, procedures, and authority of staff.

Disruption to program consistency

Volunteers faced challenges due to strict prison rules and regulations which disrupted the consistency of their programs. During the interviews with all volunteers, it became evident that the inflexible nature of the prison's rules and policies hindered the consistent operation of their programs. The concept of “consistency” encompassed various concerns, including the inability to

teach the same group of men and women every week and the unpredictability of volunteer schedules for running classes. Consistency was viewed as a critical aspect of the programs in building rapport, trust, and a stable class structure. Belinda discussed struggling to establish rapport as inmates were frequently pulled out of the baking classes due to clashes with other prison responsibilities, punishments, lockdowns, or staff shortages. The constant rotation of inmates made it difficult to engage with new individuals each session. Additionally, there was a lack of communication between prison management and the volunteers regarding their class numbers.

“I feel like they didn't tell the guys that we were coming sometimes. So, it would have been nice to have a bit more consistency to build a rapport and have the same guys for the whole time. And quite often, you'd sort of turn up and you would get new guys and they would be like, "Oh who are you? It just felt like they kind of had no idea that we were coming. And that was a bit hard to kind of engage them.”

Lorraine also faced significant challenges in maintaining a stable book club within the prison environment. Unlike her regular book club outside the prison, where she had a consistent group of participants every fortnight, the dynamics within the prison posed obstacles to achieving the same stability and consistency. Lorraine was often unaware of who would be in her class, due to the limited communication from staff about why her members were no longer participating in her class.

“Yes, well, the most challenging was that it's not a stable book club. And I thought it was going to be. I've been running my book club for 17 years. And it's the same people all the time. In the prison book club, some of the men only came once, and some came nine times. Sometimes they didn't come because they were in lockdown. And that was before the pandemic, it was because they'd done something naughty. Sometimes they didn't come because they went out [had been released from prison] and finished at the club. So, there was no way to have a coherent group every fortnight. I think that was unfortunate.”

The volunteers' concerns regarding a lack of consistency, cohesiveness, and structure in volunteer programs have been discussed in the literature. Studies conducted on prison volunteers in the United States have revealed similar issues, with volunteers frequently highlighting the strict administrative regulations which act as barriers to maintaining consistent visits with the inmates (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Kort-Butler & Malone, 2015). Research that has explored the general benefits of inmate visitation has found that more consistent visitation is associated with increased positive benefits for

the inmates and the prison, such as fewer disciplinary infractions and increased positive benefits for the inmates (Duwe & Johnson, 2016). Returning to the idea of the theory of social capital, Abrams et al. (2016) argue that there should be greater institutional-level support for the volunteer sector. This support would ensure that programs can be delivered more consistently and cohesively, to ensure they can produce the most benefits. However, the bureaucratic structure of the prisons primarily aligns with the goals and priorities of the institution itself, rather than the therapeutic goals of the volunteers, which are secondary in terms of importance for the prison (Wright & Bronstein, 2007). Such bureaucratic structures in modern prisons often create communication challenges between volunteers and staff. As exemplified by the volunteers' discussions, outsiders may struggle to navigate the complex chain of command and access the relevant information to effectively coordinate their programs (Wright & Bronstein, 2007).

“There needs to be less red tape, there are so many roadblocks”- Organisational challenges with corrections

The challenges faced by many of the participants originate from the enforcement of the prison's rigorous administrative and bureaucratic policies, which impeded the volunteers' programs. Alice, due to her close involvement with prison management, encountered these challenges to a greater extent. Most of the challenges Alice experienced with the corrections staff were a result of organisational differences between Good Bitches Baking, and the prisons they worked within. Alice shared how her managerial role required her to constantly tiptoe around the prison's strict rules, communicating with head offices, while organising the specifics for getting the volunteers into the prison to carry out the baking. Alice discussed the partnerships with corrections being difficult at times, partly due to gaps in lines of communication and all the required 'box ticking' that was taking place during this time.

“And ironically, for all prisons they are institutionalised, and you know, they live and thrive on rules and requirements. There are all these boxes, you have to tick before you can even go in. I think, you know, they too [the prison staff] felt the tensions and challenges of communication and rules....But it's generally a good partnership, but it's just you know, working at different speeds, different timeframes, they kind of go slow and then suddenly want to go, they kind of tick all the boxes, and suddenly they are like, “Oh we want to start next week..”

Conclusion:

The challenges faced by volunteers in a prison setting are influenced by the clash between the different organisational values and cultures of the volunteers and the prison system. These challenges can arise at interpersonal and managerial levels. Interpersonally, conflicts emerge between staff-volunteer and volunteer-inmate relationships. At the managerial level, operation aspects of the prison system pose challenges to volunteers and program implementation. Treatment-custody clashes that exist due to the divergent roles between custody-oriented officers and human-service-oriented officers (Misis et al., 2013) also manifested in conflicts between volunteers and staff. Additionally, volunteers had to navigate negative perceptions of inmates and staff-prisoner hostility which can be contextualised within broader neoliberal restructurings and punitive penal ideology (Crewe et al., 2015). Furthermore, volunteers had to overcome occasional hostility from prison staff towards themselves, where prison staff can be hesitant to allow more “outsiders” into the prison environment, perceiving them as an additional security burden (Arthur & Valentine, 2018).

The tensions between the clashing of cultures exhibited in volunteer and correctional partnerships also trickled into barriers to the volunteers' actual programs. Volunteers grappled to adhere to the many regulations, policies, and rules which resulted in limited access for volunteers, restrictions regarding how they could implement their programs, and disruptions to their programs' consistency. Administrative demands created challenges in partnerships with corrections which were characterised by gaps in lines of communications and corrections requiring programs to run a certain way, which often diverged from the values and missions of the volunteer agency. Volunteers also lacked agency and authority to assert their professional boundaries, which at times led to the disempowerment of the volunteers, due to their independence from the prison system. The volunteers, however, recognised the pressures placed on frontline correctional staff and prison management. Prisons increasingly must “do more with less” due to increasing budget constraints and continual lack of funding to support volunteers (Dewey et al., 2021, pp. 2). Prison institutions lack the funding to properly invest in volunteer programs or to provide facility spaces that allow for the volunteers to run their programs as they intend to (Dewey et al., 2021). The lack of funding can be understood within a broader society and government which still supports punitive endeavours (such as building new prisons) rather than investing in rehabilitative initiatives (Sinclair, 2017).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

My research focused on the experiences of prison volunteers in New Zealand. The study aimed to understand volunteers' perspectives, benefits, and challenges in the context of New Zealand's prison system. Interviews were conducted with six volunteers engaged in various activities such as tutoring, baking programs, book clubs, and creative writing courses. The research addressed a gap in the literature, which has mostly focused on religious volunteers in American prisons. My research provided a new perspective on prison volunteerism and outlines the experiences of a broad range of non-religious volunteers within a New Zealand context.

Within the current neoliberal penal policy context, New Zealand prisons face challenges including reduced correctional budgets for inmate rehabilitation, increased staff shortages, and casualisation of roles (Abrams et al., 2016; Crewe et al., 2015). Considering this context, volunteers play a crucial role in supporting prison programs and services, supplementing the work of Corrections (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022; Loughnan, 2022). However, volunteers must navigate the prison system as independent entities within a total institution.

Through reflexive thematic analysis, tensions between volunteers and the prison system were revealed. A clash of cultures emerged between the neoliberalist bureaucratic prison culture and the more flexible, humanising, and holistic worldview of the volunteers. Volunteers approached their work with altruistic and restorative motivations, leading to tensions within the prison's control-oriented and security driven approach. Volunteers experienced anxiety and confrontational prison inductions but found support from each other and more experienced volunteers. The study identified benefits for both volunteers and the inmates. Volunteers underwent transformative and experiential learning, challenging their preconceptions about inmates, offending, and the justice system. The participants developed a deeper understanding of structural influences on offending and criticised negative labels and language associated with inmates. Such findings support research that prison volunteering has transformational possibilities where volunteers have the position (as they are independent of the prison system) to critique correctional practises and question the existence and fairness of our prison systems (Gilmour & Alessi, 2022). Volunteers also provided mental health and well-being benefits, created safe spaces for inmates, established connections with the community, and offered educational benefits where it was found that volunteers employed critical and dialogic pedagogies. I argued that the volunteers' capacity to function beyond the ridged risk-averse structure of the prison, underpins the positive impacts of their volunteer work.

Volunteers also faced interpersonal challenges with staff and inmates, as well as administrative challenges imposed by the prison system. It was argued here that while the volunteers' independence creates some advantageous impacts, it can also create tensions and challenges volunteers had to navigate. Interpersonal challenges with staff were explained through treatment-custody conflicts seen amongst custody-oriented officers and human-service-oriented officers where there was clashing between the control and security responsibilities of the prison and the therapeutic and rehabilitative responsibility. Beyond complex interpersonal dynamics, volunteers also confronted numerous barriers due to the bureaucratic and stringer nature of the prison environment. Volunteers had to adhere to the many regulations, policies, and rules, which resulted in restrictions regarding how volunteers could implement and run their programs. In this chapter, it was identified that the bureaucratic administrative demands imposed on volunteer programs create significant challenges in their partnerships with Corrections, characterised by gaps in communications and Corrections' expectations for program delivery which diverged from the values and missions of the volunteers. The obstacles encountered by the participants underscore the clash between two fundamentally distinct worldviews, as they encounter a range of interpersonal and administrative hurdles arising from entrenched differences between these two entities.

Future Research in the Field:

The findings within this pilot exploratory study open spaces for further and larger research projects. Further research could explore how these tensions may manifest between correctional programs staff who uphold the rehabilitative responsibilities of the prison and front-line custodial staff who are stuck in the treatment-custody tensions. Correctional staff involved in rehabilitation may feel constrained by the structures of the prison, as the volunteer did, in their aspirations and goals to provide inmates with adequate rehabilitative opportunities that can contribute to successful reintegration into the community. The potentially strained employee and employer relationship within a correctional setting would be valuable to explore further. Additionally, due to the limited scope of research on prison volunteers in New Zealand, larger studies could explore a more comprehensive range of volunteers, from more prisons across the country to complement the research I have done here. Volunteers are valuable resources and hold unique positions within a closed-off and highly strict institution. Therefore, volunteers are valuable sources of knowledge that can allow us to reflect on how we think about our prison systems, the incarcerated community, and rehabilitation.

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Appendix A

Information Sheet for Participants

[D22/284]
[October 22, 2022]



TITLE OF PROJECT: "I Volunteer!" Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of New Zealand Community Prison Volunteers.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, we thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you, and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts postgraduate program at the University of Otago. The aim of this research project is to examine the experiences of prison volunteers within a New Zealand setting. This research will seek to better understand the contributions, challenges, experiences, and perceptions of community prison volunteers in providing rehabilitative services to inmates. The main research question to be answered is, what are the perspectives of community volunteers on their experiences, benefits, and challenges of prison volunteer work within an Aotearoa New Zealand setting? For this project, I wish to conduct interviews with a range of prison volunteers. The interviews will be used as the source of data for this research project in fulfilment of my dissertation.

What Types of Participants are being sought?

I will be recruiting members of the Aotearoa community who have volunteered within a New Zealand prison. The selection criteria for my participants are that they have carried out volunteer work within a New Zealand prison and have aided in the delivery of rehabilitative services for inmates. There are no relevant exclusion criteria. I will be seeking between four to ten participants to take part in the interview process. There are no compensation/reimbursement to be offered as participants are voluntarily offering their time and can opt to take part via zoom to avoid travel costs. The benefits in participating in this research is to have their experiences and stories documented and shared to shed light on the beneficial and positive work they do within our correctional system.

What will Participants be asked to do?

This project involves a semi-structured interview technique. The general line of questioning includes your experiences and perspectives of prison volunteer work. Some questions have been prepared advance but the rest of the questioning will depend on the way the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Sociology, Gender Studies and Criminology Program is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the HoD has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The interviews will be in person or via zoom for around forty-five minutes to an hour within a semi-public space and will be audio recorded with your consent. An interview schedule will be made available to you prior to the interview and a transcript will be available afterwards, where you will be given two to three weeks to make any amendments to the content that you do not wish to feature in the project. The primary health and safety risk in this process is the risk of COVID-19 infection. To mitigate this risk, all participants and the interviewer will be encouraged to wear a mask. A zoom interview option will also be available if the participant wishes. Time and travel pose the only main inconveniences, but negotiations around this can be arranged.

What Data or Information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

The raw qualitative data collected will be the participants verbal answers to my questions. The participants' name and volunteer organisation will be collected by the researcher, but this information can be fully anonymised within the project if the participant wishes to remain completely anonymous. The audio recording will not be published in the research or made public. If a participant is consenting, only their first name and organisation will be printed within the project. Only myself as the researcher and my supervisor, Dr Fairleigh Gilmour, will have access to the raw data and information. There may be instances where other Otago Sociology, Gender studies and Criminology department members related to the project may have access to the data only if they are required to help with the project in some way. In any other case, the information will not be shared to anyone that is not related to this project or who is associated with this department. This project is not externally funded and therefore no outside organisations will have access to the data. If it is requested, the organisations that these participants are affiliated with may wish to have access to the data, this can be made possible only with the consent of the participant.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. Data obtained will be retained for **at least 5 years**. Any personal information held on the participants [*such as contact details, audio or video tapes, after they have been transcribed etc.*,] may be destroyed at the completion of the research even though the data derived from the research will, in most cases, be kept for much longer or possibly indefinitely. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity. The project only requires your name and organisation which will be printed within the project for example when using quotations from the interview. However, this will only be

done with the participants full consent where this information can be fully omitted from the report.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish, we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer. The participants can withdraw from the study at any time after they have contacted the researcher about their wish to withdraw.

Can Participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from the project, before its completion and without any disadvantage to yourself.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Olivia Mayhew

Dr Fairleigh Gilmour

Department of Sociology, Gender Studies
and Criminology.

Email Address: mayo1043@student.otago.ac.nz Email: fairleigh.gilmour@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. However, if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph +643 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

1. Background/demographic questions:

- What organisation do you volunteer for?
- Can you tell me a bit about what your organisation does for prisoners- what kind of services do they provide to inmates?
- How did you first get involved in volunteering within a prison?
- How long have you been volunteer for your organisation?

2. Experiences:

- Can you describe some of the activities you participated in as part of volunteering within a prison? Tell me a bit about your typical day in your role.
- How often do you volunteer at a prison and for how long typically are you there for?
- What were you feeling on the first day volunteering?
- Can you explain to me what it was like for you, working within the prison environment?
- What training did your organisations provide for this role- what training did the prison provide as well? How could this training be improved in NZ?
- What was your most rewarding/best experience of volunteering?
- What was your relationship with the prisoners like? Did you feel they appreciated and respected you and the work you were doing?
- What do you think are some of the key qualities' volunteers need to have to work inside a prison with inmates?
- What are some of your motivations for doing this role? What initially drew you to work with prisoners?

3. Benefits:

- What do you think are some of the key benefits of correctional volunteer work?
- Did you experience any personal benefits from your volunteer role?
- Have you felt that your previous attitudes/assumptions about prisoners/ the prison system, changed once you started working alongside inmates. If so- how were these assumptions challenged and changed?
- Do you see yourself as a sort of support for these people who may lack support from the outside world?
- Do you believe that volunteering work can help reduce recidivism?

4. Challenges:

- What are some of the most challenging/frustrating aspects of your role and working within a prison system?
- How do you perceive the attitudes of the staff towards you? Can you give me an example of ways staff were supportive and ways in which they were not very supportive of you?
- Is it important that volunteers and workers have a good relationship?
- Do you feel there is a lack of awareness around the work you and organisations like yours do within prisons?

5. Opinion/improvement?

- What are your opinions on our prison system? Some volunteers joined due their dissatisfaction with the traditional CJS- what are your opinions on this, was this a motivation for you- did your views about our prison system change as you came into this role? If so, how?
- What changes would you like to see happening in how we conduct prison volunteer programs – how could NZ do better here based on what you and your organisation have experienced.
- What are your opinions on how the government supports prison volunteer organisations and its workers?
- More info is needed on whether vol programs like yours are effective which may help to get more attention, funding, appreciation for your work- would you like to see more systematic research into the prison volunteers like you?

6. Ending Questions:

- Overall, have you enjoyed your work as a prison volunteer?
- Would you recommend this role to others, if so why or why not? More info is needed on whether volunteer programs like the one you are involved in are effective which may help to get more attention, funding, appreciation for your work- would you like to see more systematic research into the prison volunteers like you?
- What would be some advice you would give to someone who is going into a role like this for the first time?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form for Participants



**“I Volunteer!” Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of New Zealand
Community Prison Volunteers.
CONSENT FORM FOR
*PARTICIPANTS***

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project before its completion.
3. Personal identifying information e.g. Audio recording of the interview and interview transcripts will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;

[Open data alternative]

[3. The data from this project will be publicly archived so that it may be used by other researchers, but any information that could identify you will be removed or changed.]

4. This project involves a semi structured interview technique. The general line of questioning includes your experiences and perspectives on prison volunteer work. Some questions have been prepared advance but the rest of the questioning will depend on the way the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Sociology, Gender Studies and Criminology Program is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the HoD has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.
5. A risk of this project and the interview process could be Covid infection. Masks will be worn during in person interview with social distancing. Or the participant can opt to be interviewed via zoom.
6. There is no external funding or reimbursement for participant involvement.

7. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed Name)

[Options for Anonymity: in the case where your participants are public figures, artists, musicians, politicians or government officials, and it is anticipated that they will be identified/identifiable, you can offer the following options, which should match the paragraph in the Information Sheet which states "On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer."]

- [8. I, as the participant: a) agree to being named in the research OR;
b) would rather remain anonymous.]

Appendix D

Approval From Otago University Human Ethics Committee Under a Category B Application



D22/284

Academic Services
Manager, Academic Committees and Services, Mr Gary Witte

1 November 2022

Dr F Gilmour
Sociology, Gender Studies and Criminology
85 Albany Street
Dunedin
9054

Dear Dr Gilmour,

I am writing to confirm for you the status of your proposal entitled “**“I Volunteer!” Examining the Experiences and Perceptions of New Zealand Community Prison Volunteers.**”, which was originally received on October 22, 2022. The Human Ethics Committee’s reference number for this proposal is **D22/284**.

The above application was Category B and had therefore been considered within the Department or School. The outcome was subsequently reviewed by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. The outcome of that consideration was that the proposal was approved.

Conditions of approval: Upon approval, it is expected that all members of the research team are made aware of what the standard conditions of ethical approval covers. This includes the date ethical approval expires, as well as the process regarding applying for amendments to the research.

Privacy breach: A privacy breach occurs when there is unauthorised or accidental access to someone’s personal information or disclosure, alteration, loss or destruction of personal information. Any breach of privacy needs to be reported to the University of Otago Privacy Officer immediately. This can be done via an online form <https://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/privacy-information/#breach>, or emailed to the registrar@otago.ac.nz or policycompliance@otago.ac.nz. In the case where a report has been submitted, please also inform the Academic Committees and Services Office.

Discontinuation: Advise the Committee in writing as soon as practicable if the research project is discontinued.

Amendments: Make no change to the project as approved in its entirety by the Committee, including any wording in any document approved as part of the project, without prior written approval of the Committee for any change. If you are applying for an amendment to your approved research, please email your request to the Academic Committees Office:

gary.witte@otago.ac.nz

paulette.milnes@otago.ac.nz

Appendix E

Consent Email from Good Bitches Baking for Use of Name

To whom it may concern,

Please accept this statement as acknowledgement that I give permission for Olivia Mayhew to use the following names and terms as part of her research project;

Good Bitches Baking
Good Bitches Trust
Good Bitches
Good Bitch
Prison Bake

Many thanks

Katy Rowden

Katy Rowden ([she/her](#)) | General Manager
GBB HQ | Wānaka | T: 021 2486601 | E: katy@gbb.org.nz
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