

## **HERO: Health & Education Support for the Rehabilitation of Offenders**

Using technology to support health and wellbeing for offenders

### **Context**

The project aimed to contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders within the European Criminal Justice system by providing inputs towards the promotion of a common rehabilitation framework. The key activities of the project were to develop two sets of support services: a health promotion and health monitoring module, and a learning and skill support module, for two groups of users: young and first offenders, and prisoners preparing for re-entry into society.

### **Project Objectives**

The HERO (Health & Educational Support for the Rehabilitation of Offenders), project addresses two key problems that most societies face: how to improve conditions in prisons; and how to reduce levels of re-offending and so reduce the growing number of people sent to prison.

### **Methodology**

The HERO project was developed by the Tavistock Institute together with nine partners from five European countries. It designed and tested an innovative approach to health promotion and learning for prisoners and prison staff, using web and multimedia technology. Funded by the European Commission under the Information Society Technology Programme, HERO services were piloted by prisoners and staff in six prisons in the UK, Germany, Italy and Greece as well as supporting spin off activities such as the 'One life' project (see 'client comments' below).

By helping prisoners and prison professionals make more informed and effective decisions on things like health and education whilst inside, the programme sought to help offenders to prepare for release and life on the outside. Using CD, digital interactive television and web technology, the project developed materials that enabled prisoners' skills to be assessed and matched with employment opportunities and programmes for ex-offenders. In healthcare, access to online information and decision support services helped prisoners to make better and more informed decisions about things like exercise, drugs and sexual health.

### **Impact**

For prisoners with no basic numeracy or literacy, or with low skills, multimedia and online distance learning provide an opportunity to learn in their own time and in their own environment. The programme incorporated many creative and innovative elements, including an interactive game that simulates key decisions prisoners have to make in prison and when re-entering society, and encourages them to explore their choices and their implications.

### **Client feedback**

The European commission chose the HERO project, along with another of the Institute's projects (COMPETENT) to represent leading examples of 'state of the art' in their fields,

exhibiting them at two major showcase events during 2004: the [IST2004 Exhibition](#) in the Hague, and the [eSkills Conference](#) in Thessaloniki. HERO was also presented at the [ONLINE EDUCA 2004](#) event in Berlin – the biggest exhibition in the world within the e-Learning domain.

The Institute set up the 'One spirit' project as part of the HERO project. This was a series of workshops for young people at risk of offending, which also received support from London Borough of Hackney, the Arts Council and the European Business School. The workshops provided participants with opportunities to learn skills in song composition, singing, CD-production, film-making and editing, building on their own experiences and on ideas inspired by communicating with prisoners on Death Row in San Quentin. Learning about prisoners at the extreme end of the criminal justice system, it was hoped, might help some youngsters to question their own pathways and life choices. The project ended with a showcase event where the participating young people performed their compositions and demonstrated the skills they had learned.

The HERO project, including the One Spirit events, featured as one of the case studies in the Institute's ESRC funded RECKS research project. It was singled out in the ESRC feedback as *"a fascinating, imaginative and creative action research experiment into promoting collaborative knowledge production with an at risk population of young offenders."*

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**Contact:** Joe Cullen ([j.cullen@tavinstitute.org](mailto:j.cullen@tavinstitute.org) )