

recoop

Photography: Andy Aitchison

The national specialist for older people in the justice system

Practical, peer-led, relationship-based support in prisons and across resettlement pathways.

ANNUAL REVIEW

2025
2026

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Vision

Recoop believes in a future where older people, who come into contact with the Justice system, can lead healthy, dignified and fulfilling lives.

Mission

Empowering older individuals engaged in the Justice system through advocacy, peer support services, and targeted interventions to enhance and enrich their well-being. To make time more purposeful by promoting independence and belonging whilst building resilience, at every stage of their journey.



2,558
people supported this year

385,057
peer-support touch points

3 Chair & CEO Introduction

2025/26 has been an important year in Recoop's development, a year of increased reach, deeper operational delivery and growing national recognition of the needs of older and vulnerable people within the criminal justice system.

Across the year, Recoop showed how practical, peer-led support changes daily life. People regained confidence, reconnected with others, attended healthcare, joined purposeful activity, prepared for release and felt safer in custody.

This was our first full year as an independent charity following demerger from BCHA, a larger not-for-profit housing and support provider operating across the South West.
Independence has strengthened our agility, governance and responsiveness. We invested in Board oversight, organisational infrastructure and the systems needed to grow safely.

The justice system remains under pressure from overcrowding, workforce instability, policy change, commissioning volatility and delays in prison vetting. These conditions affect how quickly services can begin.

Recoop enters 2026/27 with confidence, grounded in trusted partnerships, evidence from frontline delivery and a clear role in improving support for the growing older prisoner population.

We thank our staff, trustees, prison partners, commissioners, peer supporters and funders. Above all, we thank the people we support, whose experiences and insight continue to shape Recoop.



Paul Grainge
Chief Executive Officer



Dylan Philips
Chair of the Board

> *“Our ambition isn't simply to grow Recoop. It's to ensure that no older person in the justice system is overlooked because of their age, health or vulnerability. Every statistic in this report represents a person whose daily life became safer, less isolated and more hopeful because someone took the time to care.” Paul”*

> *"I'm proud that Recoop continues to combine compassion with strong governance, ensuring we can grow sustainably without losing sight of the people we exist to serve." Dylan”*

FIRST FULL YEAR AS AN INDEPENDENT CHARITY

Greater agility · faster decisions · stronger governance · readiness for sustainable national growth.

4 About Recoop

Recoop is the UK's only national charity dedicated exclusively to improving outcomes for older people in contact with the criminal justice system. Our work combines frontline delivery in prisons with national policy, research and system improvement. Working alongside prisons, healthcare, probation and voluntary-sector partners, we reduce isolation, improve wellbeing, strengthen independence and support more dignified, purposeful experiences of custody and release.

Our work responds to a simple but often overlooked reality: the prison system was not designed around ageing, frailty, mobility issues, dementia, bereavement, long sentences, declining confidence or complex health and social care needs. Older people in prison can become invisible, isolated and disconnected from the activities, relationships and support that help people stay well in an environment built for younger people.

Recoop's model combines professional co-ordination with peer-led support. We train and supervise Buddies, Threads champions and other peer supporters to provide practical, trusted support to those who need it most, complementing prison, healthcare, social care and rehabilitative services.

Our role

Recoop works directly with older people in prison and alongside prison, healthcare and probation teams to ensure that ageing, frailty, dementia, mobility difficulties and social isolation are not overlooked in a system designed primarily for younger people.

The insight we gain through frontline delivery helps shape better services locally and informs national policy, commissioning and practice across the criminal justice system.

04 The Need

The ageing prison population presents one of the most significant and under-recognised challenges facing the criminal justice system. Older people in custody may experience long-term health conditions, mobility difficulties, sensory impairment, dementia, loneliness, loss, anxiety, reduced confidence and barriers to meaningful activity.

These challenges are intensified by wider pressures across the prison estate, including overcrowding, staffing shortages, restricted regimes and increasingly complex needs. Everyday tasks such as getting to meals, attending healthcare or maintaining social connection can become difficult without targeted support.
Recoop's work sits at the intersection of criminal justice, ageing, wellbeing, social care, rehabilitation and resettlement, helping prisons respond more effectively and humanely, while supporting people to maintain dignity, independence and hope.

Why specialist support matters

Older people are the fastest-growing group within the prison population, yet prisons were never designed with ageing in mind. Many experience clear support needs but do not meet the threshold for formal care. Without early help, everyday tasks such as accessing healthcare, collecting meals, maintaining social contact or preparing for release can become significant barriers—and needs can escalate.

Recoop's practical, peer-led approach reaches people who might otherwise be overlooked, helping them maintain dignity, independence and wellbeing while reducing pressure on prison, healthcare and statutory services.

During 2024/25, the Lancashire Buddy Support Programme supported almost 300 people, with independent analysis estimating the support provided had an equivalent care value of more than **£2.75 million.**

5 Strategy, Values & Approach in Practice

Recoop's strategy is built around sustainable growth, co-design and delivery, partnership working and national influence. As the only national charity dedicated exclusively to improving outcomes for older people in contact with the criminal justice system, our approach follows a clear Theory of Change: Deliver → Learn → Convene → Influence → Improve Systems. During 2025/26 this meant four linked priorities:

Deliver quality
High-quality specialist services across the prison estate.

Strengthen evidence
Build the proof of what works for older people in custody.

Influence nationally
Contribute to national policy and sector learning.

Grow sustainably
Build the infrastructure to grow safely and well.

Our values, visible in the way our services operate

Dignity
Practical help and respect

Empowerment
Peer support & co-production

Compassion
Relationships & listening

Partnership
Prisons, health, probation, VCS

Innovation
Frailty & Dementia Programmes, Digital tools

WHY RECOOP

Commissioners and partners work with Recoop because we combine specialist expertise with practical delivery.

- The UK's only national charity focused exclusively on older people in the justice system.
- More than fifteen years of frontline experience.
- Proven peer-led models that reduce isolation and improve wellbeing.
- Trusted relationships across prisons, healthcare, probation and the voluntary sector.
- Evidence from frontline delivery that informs national policy and system improvement.

We don't just deliver services. We help shape a justice system that responds more effectively to an ageing prison population.

6 Our Impact at a Glance

What Success Looks Like

Success isn't simply measured by activity. It is measured by an older person who leaves their cell with confidence, attends healthcare, reconnects with others, prepares for release, or feels safer and less isolated because someone took the time to support them.

2025/26 was a year of strong, measurable reach and sustained practical impact. Each touch point is a moment of support, a person accompanied to a meal, encouraged to leave their cell, helped to attend healthcare, listened to during a difficult time, or prepared for release.

2,558
People supported

across all Recoop services & interventions

385,057
Peer-support touchpoints

through Buddy, Threads, structured wing activity & peer-led support

£2.75m+
Estimated equivalent care value

Lancashire Buddy support, 2024/25

New services mobilised

HMP Dovegate, HMP Forest Bank and HMP Fosse Way developed alongside continued delivery across established sites.

National voice strengthened

Through National Specialist Groups like Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group and wider Ministry of Justice, policy and sector engagement on older people in custody.

Cyber Essentials Plus

Achieved during the year strengthening digital assurance and commissioner confidence.

Reach matters. Change matters more. Across Recoop services, these figures represent fewer people isolated in their cells, more people accessing meals, healthcare, meaningful and purposeful activity as well as stronger preparation for release.

The £2.75m+ estimate is conservative: it covers only the replacement cost of one services's formal care hours and excludes wider benefits for independence, wellbeing, prison staff and statutory services. This is scalable to other prison sites and contracts.

7 How Our Model Works

Recoop's model is practical, peer-led and relationship-based. It identifies people who may be isolated, at risk or struggling to engage, and surrounds them with trusted support that meets practical, health and emotional needs.

Professional co-ordination
Staff co-ordinate services, train peer supporters and maintain quality and safeguarding oversight.

Buddies
Everyday peer led practical help, encouragement, companionship and signposting for those who need it most.

Threads Champions
Emotional wellbeing through structured, peer-led conversations and targeted one-to-one work.

Activity Hubs & On-Wing Activity
Safe, purposeful spaces for social connection and meaningful activity.

Resettlement support
Helping older people think about release, health, housing, confidence and continuity of care.

Service-user insight
Lived experience and service users shape how services develop, keeping provision relevant and grounded.

The Recoop difference

Our model supports the person, the prison and the wider system. It improves daily life for individuals, reduces isolation and pressure within establishments, and creates evidence that can inform national practice.

8 Service Delivery Highlights

Across 2025/26, Recoop delivered and developed services across a range of custodial environments. The year included new mobilisation activity, strengthened local partnerships, continued delivery of established services and increasing recognition of the value of specialist support for older people.

Rather than presenting each prison as a separate story, this review uses site examples to show the wider themes of Recoop's work, peer support, emotional wellbeing, purposeful activity, resettlement, partnership and systems influence.

New & developing sites

- HMP Dovegate
- HMP Forest Bank
- HMP Fosse Way
- Greater Manchester Probation Community Wellbeing Hubs

Established delivery

- HMP Wymott
- HMP Altcourse
- HMP Garth
- HMP Ashfield
- HMP Preston
- HMP Channings Wood
- HMP Erlestoke
- HMP Lancaster Farms
- HMP Kirkham
- HMP Stanford Hill
- HMP Exeter
- HMP Dartmoor

Themes, not just sites
Site examples throughout this review illustrate Recoop's recurring strengths: trusted peer relationships, emotional wellbeing, purposeful activity, resettlement and national influence.



9 Buddy Services

In this peer support model Recoop Buddies are people in prison who are trained and supervised by Recoop staff, within clear safeguarding arrangements, to support older, disabled, unwell, isolated people and those whose needs do not meet local authority care thresholds.They help with everyday tasks that can become difficult to manage alone: getting to meals, keeping appointments, staying mobile and maintaining contact with others. In 2025/26, the Lancashire Buddy Support Programme, just one of our contracts, operated across HMP Wymott, HMP Garth, HMP Kirkham, HMP Lancaster Farms and HMP Preston.

67
Active Buddies
Lancashire year-end position

280,455
Buddy support sessions
Lancashire Buddy Service

99
New Buddies trained
within the Lancashire model

40
Clients became Independent
following Buddy support in Lancashire

CASE STUDY

Restoring dignity through peer support

When DH arrived in prison, he was vulnerable, living with bipolar disorder and struggling to cope. As his mental health deteriorated, he withdrew from others, stopped eating, neglected his personal care and became trapped in a cycle of bullying, fear and isolation.

A Recoop Buddy recognised the change early. By listening without judgement, ensuring DH's immediate needs were met and helping him reconnect with mental health support, the Buddy gradually rebuilt his confidence and trust. Using his understanding of prison culture, he also helped DH return safely to work and re-engage with prison life.

Today, DH is back on his medication, eating well, working again and no longer isolated.

"We couldn't do our job without him. This is safeguarding in action; the Buddy keeps the wing safer by supporting the most vulnerable."
— Senior Prison Officer



Independent analysis completed in 2025/26 estimated that the Lancashire Buddy Support Programme delivered more than **£2.75 million** in equivalent care value, based on 2024/25 activity

This is more than peer support. It is an example of how dignity, trust and lived experience can transform lives while creating safer prison communities.

10 Threads & Emotional Wellbeing

Threads pairs people with a trained peer supporter, a Threads Champion, for structured, one-to-one conversations built around listening and trust. It's for anyone who's isolated, anxious, low in confidence, or finding it hard to engage with prison life, and it exists because many people in that position find it very difficult to ask for help. At HMP Altcourse, Threads continued to grow alongside on-wing activity, Buddy support, social prescribing and preparation for a dedicated activity hub.

3,346
HMP Altcourse
On-wing activity

50,110
HMP Altcourse
Purposeful activity hours

14,517
HMP Altcourse
Buddy support sessions

3
HMP Altcourse
Threads Champions Active

HMP Altcourse activity during 2025/26

CASE STUDY · HMP ALTCOURSE

"This one is actually listening"

A participant had tried several programmes in the community but felt they had not helped. After seeing Recoop posters on the wing, he approached the Threads Champion and joined the programme. He described Threads as different because the Champion listened and cared about what he had to say. He went further to say that he'd had better support than he had received in the community. Wing staff also observed that the Champion was supporting many participants and having a positive impact on the wing atmosphere.

Emotional wellbeing, peer support and purposeful activity reinforcing one another on the wing.

> *"Threads was different, the Champion listened, and cared about what I had to say. I can't emphasise enough… I would quite literally say that it probably helped save my life."*



11 Activity Hubs and Social Connection

Day centres · group activity · wellbeing sessions · peer support ·meaningful & purposeful activity

Activity Hubs

An Activity Hub is more than a place to meet. It is where Recoop's social prescribing approach comes to life. Through peer support, meaningful activity and trusted relationships, older people are encouraged to reconnect with routine, confidence and purpose. For many people who cannot work or access mainstream education, these activities become an important part of maintaining wellbeing, independence and social connection rather than simply filling time. This preventative approach helps people remain engaged with prison life before isolation and declining health begin to take hold.

Social prescribing in action

Our peer supporters don't simply encourage people to attend activities. They help individuals identify what matters to them, build confidence to take the first step and stay connected with the people, services and routines that support their health and wellbeing.

Sometimes that's joining a seated exercise group, accompanying someone to an Activity Hub for the first time or simply helping someone leave their cell after weeks of isolation.

- Social sessions reduced isolation and supported safer, more connected prison communities.
- Guest speakers and structured activity provided information, stimulation and purposeful routine.
- Activity hubs created trusted spaces for people who may struggle to access mainstream prison activity.
- Social prescribing helped link people to wider support, interests and wellbeing opportunities.
- Wing-based activity provided options when a central space was not available.

25,805 attendances

& engagements at Activity Hubs, groups, wellbeing sessions and other purposeful activity in 2025/26 - total attendance, not unique individuals

CASE STUDY · HMP ASHFIELD

Healthy Eating & Living Programme (HELP)

Recoop's six-week Healthy Eating & Living Programme (HELP) supports people to develop healthier habits through peer support, practical nutrition advice and achievable physical activity.

Delivered in partnership with Healthcare, the programme encourages participants to make sustainable lifestyle changes at their own pace.

The impact

- Four participants completed the first programme.
- Together they lost almost **3 stone (19kg) in just six weeks.**
- Participants reported increased energy, improved confidence and better management of long-term health conditions such as diabetes.
- Group support helped people stay motivated, build healthier routines and continue supporting one another beyond the programme.

"I learned a lot, have more energy and my clothes fit better. It's better for my diabetes."
— HELP participant, HMP Ashfield



12 Resettlement & Community Pathways

Older people leaving prison can face particular challenges around housing, health, mobility, confidence, social connection, benefits, family relationships and continuity of care. Recoop's experience shows that bespoke resettlement support for older and long-sentence prisoners needs to be specialist, practical and joined-up. During the year, we continued to provide resettlement support at HMP Erlestoke, HMP Stanford Hill and developed future work with probation, healthcare, local authorities and voluntary-sector partners. Our support provides older people with bespoke guidance on release, health, housing, confidence and continuity of care that they can take with them on exit.

308 HMP Erlestoke
Touchpoints

126 HMP Erlestoke
Social session attendees

14 HMP Erlestoke
Resettlement 1-to-1 sessions

33 HMP Erlestoke
Prison volunteers engaged

The ambition
To reform health, social care and resettlement pathways so that older people leaving prison with complex needs receive coordinated, person-centred support, joining up health, housing, probation and community services so that progress made in custody is not lost at the gate.



What specialist resettlement support addresses

- Housing
- Health & mobility
- Confidence
- Social connection
- Continuity of care
- Family relationships
- Benefits
- Bereavement
- Personal Hygiene
- Re-offending Triggers
- Independence
- Disclosure

13 Resettlement Programme Feedback

Feedback from the ten-week resettlement programme delivered in partnership with Interventions Alliance at HMP Stanford Hill (Category D). This three-year partnership has supported 96 participants across three cohorts (Year 1: 40, Year 2: 30, Year 3: 26).

Facilitator feedback

"What a joy and privilege it has been to deliver such a well put together programme. The guys have praised the handouts and suggested it has been the best course for support and information they have attended whilst serving their sentences - given some have been 40+ years, I think that says a lot."

— John Russell, Interventions Alliance facilitator



Participant feedback

"I came in thinking this was just another course, how wrong was I."

"It's a safe space to talk and not feel different to anyone else."

"Budgeting, costs to live in a property and learning about Oyster cards will help me when I leave."

"Look at the quality of what I have been given to take with me when I leave."

Programme impact

- Participants started a peer-support coffee group.
- Two released participants settled well in the community.
- Two dedicated two-hour gym sessions for people aged 50+ secured.
- Quiet space created for over-50s on the wing's third landing.
- Walking group planned (Land's End to John O'Groats).
- Drama week consistently a highlight.

''A vulnerable prisoner who kept to himself and relied on staff for everything joined the course. Within three weeks, participants formed a Thursday coffee group to support each other. He joined, felt welcome, and stopped needing staff intervention - highlighted at a prison safety meeting as evidence of the programme's impact for vulnerable and neurodiverse prisoners.''

14 Partnerships, Evidence & National Influence

Recoop's national influence starts with what our staff, peer supporters and service users see every day. We bring this frontline evidence into policy, research and practice discussions so that older people's needs are not overlooked.

During 2025/26, our peer support and social prescribing approaches were highlighted in the Chief Medical Officer's report into prisoner health as examples of positive practice. We sit on the expert panel shaping the new Older People in Prison Strategy, hold the permanent older-prisoner seat on the Ministry of Justice's Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3), and co-chair the national Older People in the Criminal Justice System (OPIC) Network.

Building on more than a decade of evidence from our Buddy and Threads models, we've also put proposals to the national strategy team for a recognised peer support framework for older people in custody.

- Bring frontline evidence from prisons into national decisions.
- Keep older people visible in policy, commissioning and service design.
- Share practical learning with commissioners, prisons and voluntary-sector partners.
- Carry out and contribute to research and evaluation, including with Clinks.

Peer-support framework - proposals submitted

OPIC Network - national co-chair

CMO report - positive practice cited

Older People in Prison Strategy - expert panel

RR3 - permanent older-prisoner seat

Why this matters

Funding Recoop's work supports more than individual services. It helps turn frontline learning into better practice, stronger evidence and a more joined-up national response to ageing in the justice system.



15 Organisational Development & Sustainability

2025/26 was Recoop's first full year operating as an independent standalone charity following demerger. The year demonstrated the benefits of independence: greater agility, faster decision-making and stronger ownership of governance, systems and organisational development.

The Board strengthened its governance through the appointment of a new Chair and Vice-Chair and the establishment of two subcommittees: the Finance & Risk Committee and the Governance, People & Culture Committee.
A skills matrix and appraisal process has informed targeted trustee recruitment and succession planning.

Recoop also continued to embed independently commissioned HR, finance, payroll, insurance, IT and governance administration support. Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation was achieved during the year, strengthening digital assurance and demonstrating readiness to operate securely within the justice-sector environment.

The organisation has invested in additional operational, administrative and corporate capacity to support growth - managing the timing gap between planned growth and income realisation through financial monitoring, workforce planning and Board oversight.

Financial stewardship
Recoop remains financially stable following its first full year as an independent charity. Trustees actively monitor budgets, cashflow and reserves to ensure the charity can continue delivering high-quality services while investing in sustainable growth.
Our full statutory accounts, including the Trustees' Annual Report, are available at recoop.org.uk.

Strengthened this year

- **New Chair & Vice-Chair**
- **Two subcommittees**
- **Skills matrix & appraisal**
- **Independent HR/ finance/ IT**

Cyber Essentials Plus
Achieved during the year, providing independent assurance that key cyber controls were operating effectively.



16 Governance, Risk & Resilience

Strong governance is central to Recoop's ability to grow responsibly. The Board provides strategic oversight of risk, finance, workforce, quality and organisational development, supported by the Finance & Risk Committee and the Governance, People & Culture Committee. The organisation's post-demerger governance arrangements are now embedded and working effectively.

Key risks actively managed during the year

- Income concentration
- Commissioning volatility
- Delayed prison vetting
- Workforce capacity
- Mobilisation pressures
- Prison regime restrictions
- Cyber security
- Infrastructure keeping pace

How these risks are managed

- Financial forecasting
- Risk register review
- Contract monitoring
- Workforce planning
- Cyber assurance
- Governance development
- Targeted use of reserves



17 Looking Ahead

Recoop enters 2026/27 with clear ambition and a strong sense of purpose. As the only national charity dedicated exclusively to improving outcomes for older people in contact with the criminal justice system, the organisation will continue to expand its reach where opportunities align with its charitable and strategic objects, specialist expertise and capacity to deliver safely and well.

- Mobilise and embed new prison services successfully.
- Pursue opportunities linked to private prison retenders and new prison builds.
- Re-establish specialist support for women in prison.
- Develop stronger resettlement and probation pathways for older and long-sentence prisoners.
- Continue contributing to national older-prisoner policy and strategy development.
- Strengthen evidence, evaluation and social impact reporting.
- Invest in workforce wellbeing, succession planning and operational resilience.
- Explore digitalisation and AI-supported tools in a proportionate, ethical and governed way.
- Grow our community probation partnerships.

Growth, managed carefully

Recoop's ambition is not simply to grow. It is to reach more people without losing what makes the model work: trusted, well-supervised peer relationships, strong service quality and sustainable workloads for staff and Buddies.

Our Vision for 2030

By 2030, we want older people's needs to be built into the way prisons, health services and resettlement pathways work, not treated as an afterthought. We will use what our staff, peer supporters and service users see every day to shape national practice, while continuing to provide trusted support on the ground.



18 Thank You

Recoop's work is only possible because of the commitment of many people and partners: our staff, trustees, prison partners, commissioners, healthcare colleagues, voluntary sector partners, funders, peer supporters, Buddies, Champions and the people who use our services.

Every day, older people in prison face challenges that the system was never designed to meet. Too often, they experience an additional hardship as limited regimes and environments fail to recognise the realities of ageing, frailty and complex need. Recoop exists to change that. Working alongside prisons, partners and people with lived experience, we'll continue building a justice system where growing older does not mean becoming invisible, but where dignity, independence and purposeful lives are possible at every stage of the justice journey.

We are particularly grateful to the people in custody who take on the roles of Buddies, Threads Champions and Activity Organisers, whose commitment makes daily life safer, more connected and more hopeful for others.

CLOSING MESSAGE

Behind every number in this review is a **person** whose life in custody became less isolated, more connected and more dignified.

Recoop will continue working to ensure that older people in the criminal justice system are seen, heard and supported.

GET IN TOUCH

recoop.org.uk · info@recoop.org.uk

Registered charity number 1139233.

Donate to Recoop

Your generosity funds real support for real people when they need it the most

recoop

The national specialist for older people in the justice system

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