## Emer O’Kane Product Leader at *Core Systems* <http://www.coresystems.biz>



### *Engaging marginalised individuals…against all odds*

# Core Systems are global experts in offender self-service solutions for use in prisons and in the community. We work with 89,000 users across justice services in the USA, UK, Europe and Australia. We provide innovative software solutions to create a more personalised and effective justice experience for the offender. This empowers him/her to take part in their rehabilitative journey and get back to being a contributing member of society. Our software allows offenders to do things for themselves; normalises them and prepares them for their new life free from crime. By doing this we are reducing the likelihood of that offender to commit another crime. This reduces the drain that the justice system has on public funds whilst reducing the number of people falling victim to crime in society.

Emer O’Kane is product leader at Core Systems, and acts as the essential link between the market and the product, developing and maintaining key stakeholder relations and offering continuous improvement to the market. Emer has over 3 years’ experience working within the prison and probation industry. Emer has a wealth of experience working closely with customers to solve their problems. Emer also has close links with offenders’ charities and social enterprises. Emer has led and managed a number of in-house research projects focusing on the user experience and time-savings in the prison environment, and has written the corresponding case studies. Emer’s research project in HMP Maghaberry in 2014/2015 was recognised as ground-breaking by the ICPA Correctional Excellence Awards Program. Emer is currently co-authoring a paper with Ulster University on the subject of user experience of software for low literacy users. Emer has written a whitepaper on the rise of technology in prisons, and has collaborated on presentations for the Technology in Prisons conference in Barcelona, 2015. Emer has a degree in marketing, qualifications in management - and a passion for research and evidence.

## Dr Sarah Elison Head of Research & Chartered Psychologist at *Breaking Free Group* http://www.breakingfreegroup.com



### *Findings from an evaluation of the Breaking Free Health & Justice treatment and recovery programme for substance misuse in prisons.*

Dr Sarah Elison is Head of Research at Breaking Free Group, where she is responsible for the ongoing research into the effectiveness of the Breaking Free Online (BFO) computer-assisted therapy (CAT) treatment programme for substance misuse. She is a Chartered Psychologist and has a background in developmental and health psychology research having worked at Imperial College London, Kings College London, St George’s Medical School University of London, and the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre at the University of Salford. Her main research interests lie in the development and evaluation of evidence-based psychosocial interventions, with a specific focus on technology-enhanced treatment programmes.

Breaking Free Group is a digital healthcare company based in Manchester and Birmingham, whose mission is to create the widest possible access to evidence-based psychological and behavioural change interventions. In order to achieve this, an adaptable digital health platform has been developed, to provide access to a clinically-robust, online treatment programme for alcohol and drug dependence, Breaking Free Online, which helps to overcome many barriers to treatment. Breaking Free Online is an evidence-based treatment and recovery programme that has been commissioned by over 60 Local Authorities and NHS Trusts across the UK, and adopted by several leading national substance misuse treatment providers, including CRI, Turning Point and Addaction. In addition, Breaking Free Online (Health and Justice) has recently become the world's first online healthcare intervention for offenders to be implemented in prisons. It was developed in consultation with the Ministry of Justice, and has been commissioned by NHS England as an integral part of the ‘Gateways’ pathfinder, a major UK Government initiative to reduce reoffending rates by supporting substance-involved offenders, and improving the continuity of care between prison and the community.

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## Findings from mixed-methods feasibility and effectiveness evaluation of the Breaking Free Health & Justice treatment and recovery programme for substance misuse in prisons.

**Elison, S; Weston, S; Davies, G; Karellen, S & Ward, J**

**Introduction:** As part of the ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ agenda, reshaping drug and alcohol interventions in prisons is a key feature of the Government’s drive to address substance dependence in the prison population and reduce reoffending rates. In order to achieve these objectives, a through-care project to support offenders following release to the community, ‘Gateways’, is taking place across North-West England prisons. Gateways provides ‘through the gate’ support to released offenders, including help with organising accommodation, education and employment, and access to a peer supporter if desired. In addition to this wider psychosocial support, Gateways is also providing access to an evidence-based computer-assisted therapy (CAT) programme for dual diagnosis – substance misuse and comorbid mental health difficulties - Breaking Free Health & Justice (BFHJ). The BFHJ programme was developed in partnership with the National Offender Management Services (NOMS) from an original version of the programme intended for delivery in the community (Breaking Free Online), providing access to clinically robust techniques based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and promoting the role of technology-enhanced approaches in recovery from substance misuse. The BFHJ programme is provided via ‘virtual campus’, a secure, web-based learning environment delivered by NOMS and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which provides prisoners with access to information, advice and guidance based around skills and work and online training and modules. Providing BFHJ on virtual campus, makes the programme the world’s first online healthcare programme to be provided in prison settings. **Aims and Objectives:** While the effectiveness of BFHJ is established within community settings (Elison et al., 2013, 2014) its potential within prisons requires exploration, so this study, which has recently been accepted for publication in Drugs, Education, Prevention and Policy, sought to achieve this. **Methods:** As per the Medical Research Council (MRC) guidelines around development and evaluation of complex interventions, a mixed-methods approach was used to examine, not only clinical effectiveness of BFHJ, but also the process of implementation of this novel, technology-enhanced approach to treatment and recovery of substance misuse in prison settings. **Results:** Significant improvements to mental health, quality of life, severity of substance dependence and other aspects of psychosocial functioning illustrate the initial effectiveness of BFHJ. Themes emerging from qualitative data around prison staff insights and prisoners experiences of engaging with BFHJ illustrate the potential of BFHJ for use in prison settings and some of the barriers to and facilitators of implementation. **Conclusions:** Findings from this study support the use of BFHJ within prisons settings, both in terms of clinical effectiveness and from a practical, implementation perspective. Further work is now underway, including a randomised controlled trial (RCT) and community follow-up, to further examine clinical effectiveness and establish longer-term outcomes from the programme via a follow-up study on substance use, mental health and offending behaviours.