

Prison is seen as the last step. It's the place society says, "keep them, we don't want them". Expelled.

How did prison hit me? It was dirty, no air, like a desert, a vacant building for those who feel left behind, for those whose life experience lead them to that grey area before they got sucked into the abyss.

Yet as time wrapped an arm around me and said, "let's talk a walk", I found in this discourse community simmering under the heat of violence, drug abuse, mental health and self-harm.

Humanity, pockets of air, exploding individually in all the mess of noise of the eat, sleep, repeat of prison life. I found a way out, a way forward.

Enter 'Think Like A Scientist'.

There I was in HMP Low Newton and Durham University had a guy coming in to teach us stuff I only dreamed about. Could I do it? Sign me up!

I was not a number, a wing, a landing, a prisoner, I was going to be a student. I was going to chat and learn from a doctor. I was going to be a scientist.

From 22nd January to 5th March, I was hooked from our first session on sleep. I linked my own key observations into my patterns and sleep deprivation. We took readings of our sleep patterns - now I found myself asking questions such as "we need a bigger study on a larger scale to validate our findings!", "can which wing you live on effect sleep patterns?" "which office that's on shift and if they have poor sleep patterns can that effect findings?"

I was asking questions – but rather than being told I'm stupid, I was told that is what scientists do – ask questions, compile theories, make arguments, think critically, and analyse.

I felt inspired. I felt that someone had given me a key and said, "that's what you could be if only you unlock the door of you mind", rather than think "I will never find the key that fits (so why try)". I actually found trying fun!!

When we went onto climate change, I realised I had fixed views of half listened to and outdated experiences. I read each article again. Even when we talked about plate tectonics, I went back to my wing telling people what I had learned. The Solar System, the universe, it's not just me in a block in a wing, in a room, alone.

I was charting the impact of mood on sleep, writing my presentation on Alan Turing for the final assignment. I was learning about how NASA wants to fly a lander onto Titan, Saturn's exotic moon. I was writing an essay on space travel, getting to talk with Danielle George MBE. I sat next to someone who has accomplished more than I can talk about.

I am talking, having a conversation about robots and artificial intelligence and I am talking with a person who lives outside and who doesn't care I am in prison - who doesn't talk about how to manage my life or whether I am good or bad. But talking about things I watch in TED videos about changing not just the world but how the world is changing, and I'm in it and I'm allowed an opinion and it's counted. I had never felt like this.

My self-worth was -2 by the time I had entered prison and in the first few weeks fell to -25. I was being crushed slowly.

But I had managed to find something in all of the mess and that was education.

By the time I met Phil [Heron] I was battling a stigma within the prison system for being transgender. I was trying to further my education, but I didn't know how or what I could do. Science was my worst subject at school. Sorry Miss Salmon but cutting up a pumped lamb's lung you left in a bag for week didn't feel like science.

Education is the only thing in prison that gives you any form of self-worth or purpose.

But learning in prison is full of alarms, excuses like "we are going back [to the wings] early as we have no staff", and loud noises. Some use education as an escape, others get put in as a way of getting rid of them.

The fact that 'Think Like A Scientist' was not in an education block was very important to the course. It gave it a platform away from those who don't apply and let those who do – let them be heard!

Science is important as it shows a world we haven't seen before, gives us knowledge of the life around us. Science educators are showing us failure is just as important as succeeding, and that science is a lot of no's a lot of questions – but that is OK!

If I could do my own course and give it to people in prison, I'd look no further than Phil because unlike a lot of people in the prison working, he has passion, a clear vision, and a goal. He made up think outside the box of our own living conditions, of the traps of our mind. The science approach in prison is needed. The course would have to be for people with level one English due to the essay writing. Some people don't like writing, but those people rarely try and engage in anything.

My course would have science and sociology in, talking about how we think as a society as well as a science topic. I would have a guest speaker and a project on how to engage ideas inside the prison system to deal with issues such as waste, recycling and environmental issues. Prisons could listen to the end product, discussing the winners ideas to be made into a reality – if it was doable.

There are projects going on in America where prisoners are creating eco-friendly environments, giving back to nature where society takes, by making food to eat, sorting waste through at prisons (not just one department), creating real change and giving prisoners responsibility within these restrictions to be able to give back. That's what people try to do – raise money for charity, be better, grow, evolve, but the system doesn't allow for that.

The techniques scientists use to link telescopes up around the world to develop the need to see the bigger picture, they push aside differences for a change to see information more clearly. That is what this course does. We can link prisons, join them and create students in the sciences rather than prisoners mopping the landings, each prison has a collective story joined by each prisoner who has their own story. The media bags everyone into one story.

We can change that story and together listen to each other and ask questions to become scientists and find a better reality.