

What follows are some insights into what Vox Liminis have been up to between 2023 and early 2024.

This has been a time of deep reflection here at Vox, with an enhanced commitment to being the change we want to see in the world. As part of this, we undertook a rewrite of our values and principles alongside members of our Unbound community.

These principles will guide our work as we move forward.

Our Values in Action

- Prioritising People
- Welcoming
- Disagreeing Well
- Sharing Power
- Making Together
- Following the Energy
-

Our Outcomes

- More Connected
- More Enjoyable
- More Just and Fair
- More Creative
- More Hopeful
- Greater Sense of Purpose

Our theme for 2023 was “Beyond”

The theme looked to stretch us in what we think and make but also in what we share and how we share it.

William, writer of the fantastic song ‘Caged Bird’, reflected on what ‘Beyond’ meant to him and its relationship to the song.

[Video of what ‘Beyond’ meant to William](#)

Throughout the year we held several gigs for family and friends to share what we’ve created. In December, we also invited members of the public to our final live performance of the year at Mackintosh Halls in Ruchill.



BEYOND BEYOND

'Life Under Observation' was one of the last songs written on the theme of 'Beyond' A small group of us explored what it means to be navigating social work straight after navigating prison. The dos and don'ts, the you can and you can'ts. The power imbalance is at its trickiest and can be made harder when you're trying your best but don't necessarily feel supported to be doing so.

Reflection on, and recording of, 'Life Under Observation'

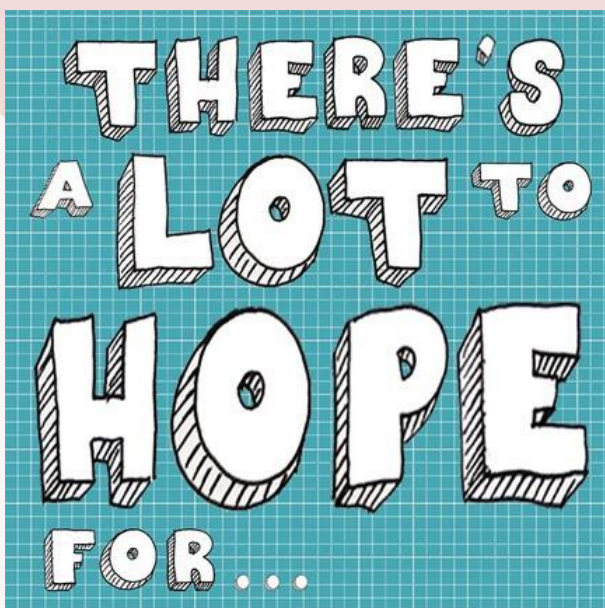
Peter's reflections on live public sharing!

"I didn't want to do it. Can I say that? I was nervous about doing it. I was going to get Jill to do it [without me]... I don't mind writing the words and that but it was the singing part that was putting me off. I was trying to build up to doing it anyway, eventually sing my own song an' that. And then I did it.

It felt amazing, just stages of doing it, the writing and stuff and Jill getting the music to it and then actually going and performing it. It was quite actually overwhelming but in a good way, not a bad way.

My girlfriend and my daughter came, and my brother and his girlfriend. I thought I was going to bottle out of doing it because they were there. But actually it was quite the opposite. I wanted to make them proud of us and to hear my song. It wasn't 100% but it was my first time doing it.

I thought it was amazing, don't mean to be biased but they said it was good as well which made me happy."



NEW YEAR, NEW THEME.

OUR 2024 THEME IS... 'THERE'S A LOT TO HOPE FOR'

THERE'S A LOT TO HOPE FOR?

Vox Liminis is a hopeful organisation.

We work together to make space for conversations around crime and harm; rebuilding connections, trust and belonging rather than further divisions. We make music and art that reflects and challenges ourselves and the social systems that we may come up against, in the hope we can change them.

This phrase 'There's a lot to hope for...' embodies these ideas.

Depending on how you say it, it can hold a world of promise or a wry sarcasm, beautiful heart felt optimism or a deep deep cynicism.

We can't quite remember who said it, but someone did, in one of the usual free flowing discussions being part of the community at Vox enables. It has resonated with enough of us over the weeks that it has become a useful theme to inspire creative activity.

What do you hope for? Let's find a way to tell people and try to change things for the better.

In Tune

In Tune has made a significant impact with children and families affected by imprisonment. For many participants, In Tune activity serves as a source of comfort, fostering pride in their positive efforts during imprisonment. The recorded songs provide a tangible connection between parents and children, serving as a unique form of communication that supports relationships and subsequent transitions.

In Tune Song writing: We worked with parents serving sentences to write and record songs for their children. Sessions were held at HMP Glenochil, HMP & YOI Polmont and HMP Edinburgh for both mothers and fathers.

In Tune Families/Early Years: Weekly sessions (each block over 10 weeks) aimed to create a fun and safe space for imprisoned parents, children, and primary carers. Activities facilitated meaningful play, building relationships and confidence.

We have recently tried out a new session format with HMP Edinburgh, which you can read about [here](#).

What did we notice?

Increased Experience of Positive Parenting: Together, we noticed that many children progressed in their relationships with their imprisoned parent. Some saw massive differences in their interactions. In Tune Families provided a unique opportunity for children to engage in activities not allowed during regular prison visits, fostering positive parenting roles.

Increased Confidence: In Tune Families allowed children to explore their creative abilities, with evidence gathered through observations, parent feedback, and questionnaires. Adopting a child-led approach allowed for collaborative song writing, building confidence and pride in their creations.

Improved Communication: The project supported improved communication between parents and children. Music helped families find a different way of expressing themselves, leading to improved connections.

Improved networks of support: Families reported positive changes in their day-to-day interactions and benefitted from an increase in new social relationships for adults and children. Connecting through music has led to friendships and support beyond the project.

"See to be honest, it's actual put me in a better head space so it has. Cause I've obviously not been coping too well with not seeing my wee boy and that and this is kinda gave me a kick up the arse to get the ball rolling with stuff like that. The last two days so much has happened, it's mad." - In Tune Song Writing (Young Parent in HMP & YOI Polmont)

"Cause my daughter's only 3 months I haven't put her to bed yet so that'll be a bedtime song from her dad, and she'll hear my voice." - In Tune Song Writing (Young Parent in HMP & YOI Polmont)

Song Writing Sessions in Prisons

At the latter end of 2023, we partnered with SISCO to work alongside a group of people in recovery while on remand in HMP Barlinnie. We explored what 'Beyond' means when you're in the limbo of not knowing what your beyond might be. We discovered that for a couple of the guys 'beyond' doesn't mean thinking about the future, it made them think of the things that have already happened and are beyond them to fix. It showed us again that themes have various contexts and create lots of paths to go down. Over four sessions we wrote 'Always (Check In)' together. Below are some lyrics from the song, or read about/listen [here](#):

*I can't wait to get ma date
Until then I'll just be trying to stay in ma own
lane
I'm floating about in limbo
Sometimes not having answers is a good
thing though*

*Never on time, always late
Hiding from the rain on a sunny day
Any spare change to take away my pain
Hiding from the rain on a sunny day*



We also ran summer song writing sessions in the Liliac Centre in Maryhill. Working with a group of women, we brought various creative exercises to explore different ways of song writing and played with various types of instruments while learning about chords and how songs feel on the way. In week 1 there were nerves even putting pen to paper, but by the end everyone was behind mics recording 'Time'.

Growing with the Unbound Community

Vox Liminis launched the theme "Beyond" based on work in Unbound, fostering creative exercises and responses inside and outside prison settings – and initiating creative conversations between the two, including through:

- ♦ Theme Exploration (Beyond)
- ♦ Tuesday Evening Gatherings
- ♦ Creative Sessions - Supporting people in times of transition.
- ♦ In Prison Songwriting supported by an Unbound sessional support team
- ♦ Sharing with the wider community
- ♦ Sharing to audiences at Solas Festival, GLAD Cafe and Mackintosh Halls

What did we notice?

Expansion of Reach:

Our Tuesday night Unbound Gathering has seen increased participation from various criminal justice settings, including individuals on home leave from prison, recovery spaces, and social work involvement.

The introduction of additional creative sessions has provided more flexibility and catered to diverse preferences.

In-Prison Song writing Sessions:

Song writing sessions in HMP Castle Huntly have continued, contributing to positive experiences for individuals nearing the end of their sentences and building relationships prior to release – welcoming new faces who bring their energy and talent to creative pursuits and can benefit from the support of our Unbound community post-release.

Sharing creative work with wider community:

Unbound's sharing of work in wider contexts have expanded opportunities for creative expression, achievement, purpose, and community engagement.

We have welcomed family and friends to share in our creative world and new ideas for further sharing have emerged including the potential for collaboration with venues for regular open mic sessions and sharing the stage with a more diverse range of artists.

Employment Opportunities and Team Involvement:

Unbound has employed seven community members in paid sessional roles (Unbound Sessional Team), enhancing support for less confident songwriters, ensuring that lived experience shapes the groups and informs relationships and support.

Regular involvement of community members in planning, decision-making, and project delivery has strengthened the sense of ownership and community within Unbound.



Transition: Tam's Experience

"I've recently just come out of prison 8 months ago. I was a first-time offender and never expected to find myself in prison. It was a culture shock, learning how to manage everyday life in prison.

I didn't go to jail until I was 43, and before that I had worked since I was 15 and was a normal part of society. Run of the mill. I can't explain how hard it was to go to prison for a seven-year sentence.

When I came back out of prison it was an eye-opener. That's really where Vox come in. I'd been part of the weekly sessions Vox ran at HMP Castle Huntly near the end of my sentence and I'd loved them. They made you feel comfortable, teaching us how to write and how to think about writing songs as an outlet. It was the best thing I'd experienced during my whole sentence.

When you're released though, it's challenging, very challenging. Very alone. But having Unbound to come to at Vox, it's my go to. It's my reason to get up to be honest, and to get out. I come here and everyone is supportive and helpful. It's really helped me get back into feeling like I'm in a community, especially one where you're not judged, which is how I can feel in lots of places right now. You get to do things you love, which for me is singing. I've learned creative things while also being supported in more personal ways, including with my mental health, social work meeting support, even with making my flat feel like a home. I had nothing when I came back out and it's hard to get help with what to most people would seem like simple things. Vox have done their best to help in as many ways as possible, whether it's paying for my bus ticket or just being flexible with other needs I've got. They've given me opportunity. It has been tremendous, it's just so lifting. I wish I'd found this a long, long time ago. My next aim is to learn guitar so I can play my songs as well as sing them, and to give me another outlet while I'm at home to keep my mind of more difficult things – Vox have set up lessons in the new year so I can't wait for that. I see what Vox has and is doing for me, and I see the same for other people. It's crucial."

Creative Commissions

We occasionally take on commissioned work outside our usual sphere of criminal justice. Glasgow City Council Education Services asked us to develop and deliver creative sessions to explore the concerns of young people and how as a society we can aim to make change for a more supportive and successful future. Working with students from Hyndland Secondary School, we created 'Manifesto for a Fairer Future'. An article about this is available on the Glasgow Times website.

[Article about "Manifesto for a Fairer Future"](#)



A Skylit Stage

Back in the summer we decided our concrete jungle of a courtyard needed some life and colour brought to it. A trip to a garden centre later and it was all hands on deck to fill planters and hanging baskets. By making this area a space people wanted to be, it suddenly spurred on other ideas – including an outdoor stage. A 'skylit stage' will become a reality very soon...

Other ways we share...

Over recent months, we have continued to find ways to share the things we've been making, and the learning we've made together, towards positive change.

Alongside the Paper Planes song releases and gigs we've played, we have regularly shared Vox Liminis songs to prompt discussion and learning with trainee social workers, community workers, criminal justice professionals, students and academic conference delegates in locations close to home in Glasgow and Dundee, and all the way to Porto, Portugal, Leiden, the Netherlands and Philadelphia, USA.

The Scottish Prison Service have used two of the poems from A Casual Kindness - a collection of poetry written with Unbound and Pádraig O'Túama - in their SPS leadership training programme (Things the System Taught Me, and Bad Letter Day). Some of the poems from this collection have also been included in Social Work, A Reader (2023, Routledge), a book which 'brings together some of the most significant ideas that have informed social work practice over the last fifty years'.

You can listen to some recorded versions of the poems [here](#).

Things the System Taught me

You will be branded and it will be sore
You will be brutalised and it will be sore
You will be controlled and it will be sore
You will be told when you can eat and it will be sore

You will have limited contact

You will be given a choice to start again and it will be sore
You will be given support but you'll need to comply and it will be sore

The leash will be tight which will be sore
The process will come to an end which will offer hope
So, if you stay, a day will come when you will feel free
Feeling free will likely feel sore
Hope, too, is sore, the more of it you get

by the Unbound Community with Pádraig Ó Tuama

2023/24 in numbers....

237 People engaged in activity

68 Vox sessions in prison settings (HMP Castle Huntly, The Liliac Centre, HMP Barlinnie, HMP Glenochil, HMP Edinburgh, HMP&YOI Polmont)

45 Tuesday evening gatherings

44 community creative sessions

3 Public sharings

1 festival appearance

Countless conversations

