

PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A CASE STUDIES SERIES



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The views expressed in these case studies are those of the respective organisations and the publication of the case studies should not be viewed as an endorsement of these organisations and their work by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. The data and statistics presented within the case studies have been locally collected and cannot be verified by the Home Office, Clinks and Social Firms UK.

Background

Low qualifications and lack of employment are recognised within the Government's strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation* as key social issues related to re-offending.*

Some local areas have already developed social enterprises as one way to overcome barriers around the employability of ex-offenders. However at the time of writing there is currently very little that brings together learning or examples of effective practice to assist others in doing this.

Recognising this gap, the Home Office commissioned a short term programme of work undertaken in February and March 2013 by Clinks and Social Firms UK.

The programme set out to explore and assess the role of social enterprises in enabling both adult and young offenders to access training and employment opportunities. The results provide a body of work that will significantly contribute to cross-Government thinking about how to embed and support social enterprises working with offenders. The programme included two elements:

- The development and publication of this series of twenty Case Studies. The social enterprises featured in the case study series were invited, following a competitive application process, to write about their own experiences and insights into the opportunities and barriers confronting their development and sustainability.
- A Summary Report which brings together the key learning about developing and sustaining social enterprises offering employment and employability training to offenders.

Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

These resources also complement previous work undertaken in partnership between Clinks and the Home Office aimed at increasing the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector's involvement in local IOM arrangements.

* Ministry of Justice. May 2013. *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*: www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation

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POSITIVE PROCUREMENT CHANGES LIVES

Howard Platts

Introduction

Action Trust breaks the cycle of offending and homelessness by creating training and employment opportunities for ex-offenders, homeless people and armed forces veterans.

Action Trust achieves this by:

- Creating financially sustainable social businesses
- Working in partnership to provide wrap around support to volunteers and employees
- Recruiting through partner organisation referrals.

Action Trust receives no government funding and, apart from the initial investment by the partners, it pays its way through the commercial income it generates.

Background

Action Trust was founded by TREES Services, a development organisation that has been involved in running and supporting social enterprises for the last fourteen years. TREES previously managed Spark Challenge, a £3 million investment programme supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The funding was used to support the development of over thirty social enterprises that help homeless people to transform their lives. The businesses included: manufacturing wicker coffins; bike repairs and refurbishments; property maintenance; antique restoration; and social lettings agencies. The main driver for Spark was to create sustainable businesses that could deliver social outcomes year after year after year, delivering social justice through enterprise and offering people a hand up, not a hand out.

TREES continues to manage Action Trust, building on many of the lessons learnt from this experience.

The idea for the first Action business came from a visit to HMP YOI Glen Parva in August 2010, to provide some advice on construction training. The visit ended in the cleaning workshop where young offenders gained British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICSc) qualifications. One of the Spark enterprises had set up a cleaning business to employ homeless people. This demonstrated that there was a potential opportunity to create a business to employ ex-offenders when they left prison and so Action Clean was set up.

Our previous work had demonstrated that ex-offenders are far less likely to re-offend if they can find employment on release from prison. We recognised that many employers were reluctant to employ ex-offenders, so the Action Clean model was designed to give ex-offenders an employment track record and a reference so that they could move on to permanent employment.

Our experience: Action Trust

TREES formed a partnership with: Action Homeless, an organisation that provides supported housing to almost one hundred homeless people in Leicester; Apex Works, a provider of training to disadvantaged people in Leicester that has historically worked closely with ex-offenders; and Glen Parva. All agreed to contribute a mix of commercial work, financial investment, training and wrap around support to meet the individual needs of the participants.

The Action Trust model was originally developed to offer:

- Eight weeks volunteering
- Support to gain a secure housing tenancy (mandatory to gain employment with us)
- Six months employment
- Support to gain alternative/ongoing employment after six months
- Supervisory opportunities
- Ongoing employment for people with skill sets we wish to retain
- Apprenticeship/NVQ Level 2 qualification opportunities with partner organisations.

Action Clean became operational in April 2011.

The initial plan was for Action Clean to offer twelve volunteering opportunities to ex-offenders each year, of whom eight were expected to be offered six months' employment. This meant that we would have a typical workforce of two volunteers, two employees and two supervisors, resulting in two teams that could carry out cleaning contracts. The initial business model envisaged that we would primarily undertake one-off, void cleaning for housing associations. In reality we gained weekly, monthly and occasional daily cleaning opportunities for these customers.

The anticipated steady flow of volunteers from Glen Parva did not materialise, however, and as with any new business we found that we either did not have enough work to do or not enough people to undertake potential work opportunities. As a result we changed our plans over the summer of 2011. Action Clean offered volunteering opportunities to Action Homeless residents, about 50% of whom are ex-offenders. We also had new partners in Leicestershire & Rutland Probation Trust (LRPT) and REACH (which offers support to offenders in finding employment pre and post release). With a new source of volunteers we were able to meet customer demand and went on to set up two new enterprises - Action Paint and Action Garden.

Action Trust was then formed to manage the three businesses, Clean, Paint and Garden, our commercial activities being targeted at providing traditional caretaker services to anyone with a property to manage.

During the first six months we gave volunteering opportunities to seven people (four ex-offenders) and employment to five people (three ex-offenders). In 2011, turnover grew from zero in April to £7,000 per month in September.

Action Trust's portfolio of businesses continued to develop new areas of work. We won a daily cleaning contract with Quality of Life, a drug and alcohol recovery centre, which would lead to a significant development the following year. We set up Action Fix which offered a value-for-money handyman service to customers. We also started to offer two week work experience placements to Glen Parva offenders who were undertaking a thirteen week Prince's Trust development programme whilst released on a temporary licence (ROTL). One of this group completed his sentence working with us while ROTL, and we went on to employ him in March 2012.

By the end of the first year we had given volunteering opportunities to nineteen people (ten ex-offenders, with seven referred by REACH) and employment to nine people (five ex-offenders). We had a full time manager, six other employees and three volunteers at the end of March 2012. Turnover had grown to around £10,000 per month.

Year two saw an increasingly close working relationship with LRPT/REACH, offering volunteering opportunities to those already released from other adult prisons and to those undergoing non-custodial sentences.

We also developed a new and very different service. Having established a focus on property services, and contrary to the experience within TREES that community cafes never work, we were offered the opportunity to take over the running of the staff cafe at LRPT's main offices, with the aim of training up ex-offenders to work in the hospitality industry. Within a month of this, we were also asked to manage an in-house café at the Quality of Life drug and alcohol recovery centre (where we discovered our catering manager). As a result, Action Food was launched.

Our first catering job came about when a sister organisation was converting derelict houses into homes using a workforce of armed forces veterans and letting the properties to ex-service families. A number of Action Trust employees and volunteers helped out on this project. It was filmed as part of Channel 4's Great Property Scandal programme and Action Food supplied the buffet for George Clarke and the rest of the wrap party at the end of filming. This was Action Food's first buffet – not a bad start!

We created Action Build to convert thirty empty properties in Leicester on behalf of the Action on Empty Homes partnership, which will create move-on accommodation for at least sixty of their hostel residents between January 2013 and March 2015. This has proved to be beneficial for everybody, with one Action Trust employee moving into the second property we completed and two residents of the first property becoming volunteers with Action Trust and working on the next properties.

Action Trust has explored many options to provide work experience and training for our participants, all using the social enterprise model, with varying degrees of success. Action Clean and Action Paint have been consistent performers in year two, averaging £12,000 turnover per month between them. However, Action Garden has been very up and down in terms of workload and was adversely affected by our inability to retain suitably qualified and experienced staff. Action Fix has not been successful, and has not generated sufficient income to cover its running costs. Action Build and Action Food are currently generating £15,000 per month turnover.

Key achievements to date

	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Volunteer starts – ex-offenders	10	21	31
Volunteer starts – other	9	3	12
Volunteer starts – total	19	24	43
Employee starts – ex-offenders	5	9	14
Employee starts – other	4	5	9
Employee starts – total	9	14	23
Managers	1	2	
Supervisors	1	2	
Employees	5	7	
Volunteers	3	8	
Not re-offended/held a secure tenancy/remained employed for at least 12 months			7

Action Trust delivers its products and services to the same quality, at the same price and in the same timescales as its commercial competitors, whilst delivering added social value. We believe that positive procurement changes lives and promote this ethos to potential customers. Ninety percent of our commercial income is from organisations that have made the decision to buy products and services from us because it matches their ethos and/ or helps to deliver their Corporate Social Responsibility objectives. Our customers are spending money with Action Trust that they would be spending anyway and are gaining added social value. The greater the commercial income we generate the more volunteers and employees we can support. So our model creates a win - win scenario for all parties.

Action Trust's key strength is that it works in partnership with organisations that can provide:

- Commercial work contracts
- Referrals to potential volunteers
- Support e.g. employment skills, a housing tenancy, money management, overcoming addiction, etc.
- Business premises, payroll, HR, management.

Our partner organisations have a vested interest in the success of the people they refer to us and offer us a range of ongoing support to participants.

Key learning

What we have learned about our business model:

- Partnership is critical for:
 - » Finding work
 - » Referral of potential recruits
 - » Supporting volunteers/employees.
- Responding to partner and customer needs is vital to:
 - » Develop new business ideas e.g. Action Food
 - » Enhance the existing offer, e.g. window cleaning, chewing gum removal.
- Flexibility and being open to new ideas or altering existing beliefs creates viable opportunities.

Overall we have found that creating commercial income that finances employment of ex-offenders is essential because reliance on funding or grant income will not create sustainable social businesses.

What we have learned about working with offenders:

- Offering opportunities to ex-offenders does not guarantee success:
 - » Some will not grasp the opportunity
 - » Others do not have the right attitude or aptitude.
- Those that grasp the opportunity succeed – over 70% of those employed, remain employed for more than six months
- A mixed workforce in terms of age, background (including non offenders) and other disadvantaged groups works
- It is important to have experienced/qualified employees to lead each business area.

We believe that significant social value can be created by using our approach. It costs £45,000 a year to keep someone in prison. To date Action Trust has helped seven people not to re-offend for over one year. This can be seen as creating up to £315,000 of social value. Action Trust was also chosen as one of Deloitte's Social Innovation Pioneers, with the aim of replicating the Action Trust model in other parts of the country. We have had plenty of interest and this will become a primary target for year three.

