

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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BUILDING LIVES

TRAINING ACADEMY

Building Lives Social Enterprise

An example of a construction Social Enterprise working with ex-offenders

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Introduction

This case study presents Building Lives Training Academy's experience of developing a Community Investment Company (CIC) to provide education, training and development for local residents aged between sixteen and sixty. It will focus specifically on our work supporting and employing offenders within their local community. It will show how we have helped participants to overcome obstacles such as lack of family support, lack of stable accommodation, negative peer influence and not having identification documents and bank accounts.

Building Lives is an award winning social enterprise run as a CIC. It was set up in 2010 by Steve Rawlings, Chief Executive of a large construction firm. He discovered that 60% of people living in social housing were unemployed and thought there was a way of helping some of them to access employment in the construction industry. Building Lives supports unemployed individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds into sustainable employment via construction apprenticeships. We found that 40% of our client group are ex-offenders and there may be others who have committed crimes but have never been caught, although this figure is more difficult to measure. One of our managers, Sian Workman, used to work for London Probation Trust and one of the projects she ran suggested that many young ex-offenders aspire to gain employment within the construction industry. This gave us the opportunity to develop a specific programme targeting ex-offenders, helping them to address the problems that many of them face when trying to get a job. Research shows that ex-offenders who secure employment are 50% less likely to re-offend, but many find it hard to get work with criminal records.

Background

We work with individuals from a range of diverse backgrounds and most are from deprived areas. Eleven percent of our apprentices are women (the industry standard is just 1%). We support local unemployed people to become work ready through a 12 week pre-apprenticeship training course. Those who are fully committed are then placed into paid apprenticeships with a variety of construction companies such as Mulalley, Mansell, Lakehouse, The Mears Group, Sir Robert McAlpine, Ardmore Group and their supply chains. Eighty five percent of our apprentices complete their apprenticeships and 78% of those who want to remain in construction go on into sustained employment afterwards. They are often taken on by the subcontractors they have been working with. We currently have four training Academies in London: Camden, Hackney, Sutton and Southwark. We have a vision to grow and we are currently in discussions with four other London local authorities to set up new training academies in these areas. We are forecasting to have supported five hundred people into paid apprenticeships by the end of 2014.

Based on our experience of working with a large number of people with a criminal record, we identified a number of barriers that they face when trying to go back to education and training. If they want to enrol at a local college, they must produce documents to verify who they are and many ex-offenders cannot produce these documents as they often have chaotic home lives. Colleges undertake entry level assessments to ensure that learners meet the minimum requirements for the course. Research undertaken by the Prison Reform Trust suggests 20-30% of offenders have learning difficulties and/or disabilities such as dyslexia and will require additional support.

When it comes to gaining employment, preparing offenders for the job market is much more than delivering vocational skills. It is important that support organisations understand

the causes of offending and find out whether this has been addressed by the individual. If not, plans must be put into place to break this pattern of behaviour and to remove barriers to employment by developing a system in partnership with vocational educators, government departments, local community support groups and local construction businesses/subcontractors. Our objective is for these individuals to gain sustainable employment. All of this must be accomplished in a climate of recession, lack of family support for the offender, negative peer influences and lack of stable accommodation from which to go to work.

Our experience: Building Lives Training Academy

The focus of this case study is the programme developed by Building Lives Training Academy in partnership with Broadway London support services (a local charity to the Camden Academy), local Further Education (FE) Colleges, construction companies and subcontractors. We provide vocational education, training and employment for offenders and a support package for employers to overcome most of the obstacles associated with taking on offenders.

We recruit to the programme through targeted referrals from the National Crime Reduction Organisation (NACRO), National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and a range of other organisations in the local community. These organisations help to ensure that the individuals have support in place to apply for this apprenticeship.

The first step is for the support partners to carry out an initial interview to assess key skills, literacy and numeracy levels. Candidates need to be at entry level 3 in order to understand the course materials and to be able to complete the practical exercises on the programme. Those that show potential for doing the work are selected for a five day taster course at the Building Lives Training Academy.

The taster course provides an opportunity for us to assess participants' punctuality, attendance and engagement. It also gives candidates an opportunity to experience basic construction skills and decide if this is what they want to do. Candidates who have not been in work for some time or who have only recently left custodial situations, enrol on Building Lives apprenticeships to try and gain stability, routine and a future. However, getting up early each morning and arriving at work on time ready to learn can be a challenge for all our apprentices, including offenders. This can be a particular problem for the younger ones and those lacking in family support, who are often living alone in hostel accommodation. It is therefore vital that our pre-apprenticeship training courses include the development of a work ethic and clear expectations about how trainees will behave on site.

If the candidate is able to attend for five days, arrive on time and engage in the work, he or she will be offered an opportunity to join a Level 1 BTEC course in Basic Construction Skills. This course is run on two days a week for ten weeks and participants are not paid to attend, which requires them to manage money, arrange their transport to and from work, arrive on time and stay for the entire day, normally 08:45 to 16:00. This is a major step in bringing the candidate back into the world of work as it creates a routine.

The taster course helps us to assess candidates for the purposes of offering them employment on the paid apprenticeship NVQ Level 2 Maintenance Operations Course. This course requires the candidate to go from a two day a week workshop-

based course to a full five days at work every week for fifteen months. The candidate will be in the workshop two days a week and on the actual building site three days a week. For some candidates who are ex-offenders, this will be the first time they have been required to work five days a week either before or since leaving prison.

The NVQ course is a framework delivering key skills, theory and practical experience, initially in a workshop setting, to meet the Diploma requirements. Participants then move on to have their skills assessed for the NVQ apprenticeship, on site, in a real workplace.

Apprenticeship Officers line-manage participants once they are on the NVQ 2 apprenticeship and are responsible for assisting and supporting apprentices through the course and signposting them to other agencies as and when necessary. The ultimate objective of the programme is that participants obtain full time work upon completion of the NVQ Level 2 apprenticeship. Building Lives Training Academy has an impressive track record with 85% of apprentices completing their apprenticeships and then 78% of these going on to sustain employment afterwards. So far around 22% of these have been ex-offenders.

Workshops have been introduced to help offenders create and update their CVs, prepare for interviews and address situations which may occur on site.

One specific barrier that ex-offender participants must overcome is to produce identification details. Registration for courses with the local FE College requires photo identification, a national insurance number, an address with telephone contact details and details of an emergency contact. These basic necessities can be a challenge for candidates who have lost many of their personal belongings through unstable accommodation and periods in custody. There is also the emotional side of losing contact with their family, making it difficult for them to name a suitable next of kin.

Individuals will also need to produce identification to sit exams and receive college certificates. In order to start the apprenticeship, and later, to get a job, they must open a bank account, for which they will need photo identification details. Furthermore, all candidates must acquire a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card which also requires photo ID or an endorsement from the employer. To obtain this card, apprentices learn basic first aid and health and safety standards and must pass the tests. This CSCS card is vital for anyone to be able to work on a building site.

Candidates are supported to obtain photo identification and to open a bank account during the ten week Level 1 course. To ensure offenders on this course have an incentive to complete the programme, we have recently embedded training for the CSCS exam in the curriculum for all learners. Those not selected for the paid apprenticeship will now have their CSCS cards to show as a tangible outcome of their time on the level 1 course, a valuable asset when trying to secure work on any building site.

A further issue for apprentices who have criminal records is that they are required to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service Form (DBS – previously Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks) in preparation for work assignment. This is because much of the construction work we provide requires apprentices to work in tenanted properties and DBS forms are required by landlords. All candidates are told this from the outset. We require individuals to disclose as soon as possible so that we can put proper risk assessments in place. Ex-offenders often worry that this will cause them to be excluded from work opportunities. Indeed, disclosure to subcontractors, colleges and social landlords (i.e. Local Authorities) can fuel negative perceptions. But as

offenders gain the employers' trust by turning up on time, carrying out tasks and changing their behaviour they are moved from working on empty properties and external work into internal work, demonstrating that these negative perceptions have been overcome.

These perceptions of the offender in addition to their own low self-esteem, lack of confidence and poor social skills can create defensive attitudes which block their communication and learning. These obstacles and others must be overcome if an offender is to have a reasonable chance of completing the course and moving on in life. In some cases, addressing the anger and behaviour management of apprentices, both on the course and on site, has been a challenge. Broadway London has made a major contribution in providing assessment, advice and guidance and also sign-posting individuals to other support agencies. Negotiation and conflict management skills are important to support all our apprentices and it is an objective of the course that participants accept responsibility for their personal actions.

The Building Lives Training Academy addresses all of these obstacles from the taster through to the NVQ Level 2 course providing support, guidance and mentoring to change attitudes and perceptions while building lives for offenders. Apprenticeship Officers maintain contact with all apprentices for one year after completion of the NVQ Level 2 in Maintenance Operations, to track their employment status and offer continued support. Apprentices also come back in to the Academies to promote the programme to others and to speak about their experience since.

A survey of four ex-offenders from a previous Building Lives Cohort in Camden is very positive. All four are working. Three of the four have moved sites and employers for increases in wages and to access more training to increase their skills. Furthermore, none of the four has offended in the year since completing the course and they are confident they will not re-offend now they have stability and a sense of purpose in their lives.

Recently the Camden Building Lives Training Academy apprentices participated in National Apprentice Week in March 2013. Their project was to paint and decorate two Tenant/ Resident Association Halls in Camden as part of their NVQ Level 2 training and assessment. Under the supervision of their tutors the apprentices accomplished this task to a very good standard. They were able to see the end result of their efforts and gained a great deal of confidence in their skills. One apprentice stated during the presentation ceremony:

"If I had not been given this opportunity by Building Lives Training Academy I would have been sentenced to a Young Offenders Institute by now."

Key learning

Over the past two years Building Lives Training Academy has overcome many obstacles to ensure offenders who truly make the effort are given the opportunity to achieve.

Getting a good mix of ages and genders in the workshop and on site is important to challenge negative peer pressure from people in their neighbourhoods. The more mature Building Lives apprentices, who have been in similar situations, share their experiences with young apprentices to help them understand the value of achieving the qualification. One 21 year old offender, who has struggled with his anger, driven by his fear of not achieving, recently commented to his Apprenticeship Officer (about one of the older apprentices):

“This man has shown me so much and calmed me down so much I don’t know where I would be today without his help. He has shown me there is much more to becoming a man than just turning 21.”

Providing ex-offenders with vocational education, training and development with real jobs at the end appears on the surface to be a good deal, however the apprentice pay of £2.65 per hour does pose a problem for those apprentices who must travel to and from the workshop and building site from another London borough. Money management workshops have been set up and Building Lives Training Academy has a travel policy which provides re-imbusement for travel costs.

The learning curve has been steep, but successful. All of the partners involved in Building Lives were initially responsive to the ideas of working on the programme, but now we have the foresight and understanding of the requirements and processes that support apprentices to overcome barriers. And it is the strong partnership that enables Building Lives to succeed. We could not do any of this work in isolation and so our strong partnership really is fundamental to everything we do.

In addition to the main Academies, we have also started working with key stage 4 students (14-16 year olds). We work with schools in Southwark to take pupils who have been identified as less likely to gain an academic qualification and work with them out of school, two days a week, to teach them a vocational qualification (Construction Level 1 BTEC). This is in the hope that they will not slip through the net, and will be able to go straight into a Building Lives paid apprenticeship upon leaving school, reducing the potential for young people – including those not in education, employment and training – from turning to substance misuse and crime. This is our attempt at preventing people from becoming offenders in the first place.

Building Lives CIC is still a fairly new social enterprise, which is growing and developing all the time. We are not afraid of change. Being relatively small and free of many bureaucratic processes often associated with larger companies, we are able to learn and adapt quickly, to make sure we constantly improve our ways of working. Building Lives is proving to be successful delivering our core aim – to get local unemployed people into sustainable apprenticeships within the construction industry. The Building Lives partnership has met and overcome obstacles associated with working with offenders, provided a safe place for them to take risks, tear down the barriers and re-build their lives. Together we can build lives.

