

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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Stonemasonry Project

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Introduction

This case study describes how Changing Paths established a stonemasonry workshop within the walls of HMP Rochester to train serving prisoners and developed a second, external workshop thus doubling capacity and employed an ex-offender to run both.

The project also demonstrates how Changing Path's core work - that of placing offenders and ex-offenders into full-time employment – was adapted and modified to suit this opportunity without losing or minimising its support network.

There were many obstacles to overcome, some scepticism and difficult funding issues to resolve as Changing Paths developed a route for serving offenders to gain a rare skill which would lead to full-time employment. The key areas of support – including local businesses who saw the potential and rallied to help, carefully managed publicity and even royal interest – all played a part in the project's development and current success.

Background

Changing Paths is an independent social enterprise and charitable trust that was set up by the Wates Family Enterprise Trust through its Wates Giving charity programme. We specialise in providing appropriately screened and travel supported offenders and ex-offenders to the construction and retail industries throughout London and the South East. We have sourced quality training providers, putting together an industry accepted package which enables those who come through the programme to begin immediate work on construction sites. We have formed partnerships and delivered contracts with NOMS, Kent and London Probation Trusts, Jobcentre Plus, City Hall, London Development Agency and the Olympic Development Agency.

Working closely with the Prison and Probation Services, we interview each applicant/referral during which the abilities and wishes of the individual are taken into account before we suggest a route to employment. Using our network of partners, we are then able to select a specific job – we never train an offender unless there is a job waiting for them – and after gaining the required qualifications e.g. the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme, the participants complete two to four weeks of work experience. This ensures they can handle the responsibilities of timekeeping and commuting, as well as being able to maintain a good standard of work which is acceptable to the potential employer.

Changing Paths has evolved a proven approach which enables us to; engage with offenders whilst they are in custody, provide assistance to find employment thus contributing to a reduction in the re-offending rates, provide training to offenders before and on release and then support them into paid, sustainable jobs within the construction and retail industries plus – just as importantly – provide them with ongoing mentoring for as long as is necessary.

In conjunction with HMP Rochester, Wates Giving and Kent Probation Trust, Changing Paths has now created a 'through the gate' stonemasonry training and employment programme in HMP Rochester to provide vocational training and real opportunities for ex-offenders to gain lasting skills and sustainable employment. Our aim is to provide a world class programme that will provide the construction industry with skilled craftsmen who will build, repair and maintain some of our nation's most prestigious buildings.

Qualified stonemasons are sought after in the general construction industry and they are particularly in demand for more specialised areas, such as work on listed buildings. To train and supply such individuals will not only help to fill this demand, it will provide a unique and life-long skill for the individual participants.

Our experience: Stonemasonry Workshop

The idea for the stonemasonry workshop and a critical part of its development was one prisoner. M was a serving prisoner at Standford Hill Prison on the Isle of Sheppey. As part of our general programme working to help prisoners gain employment on their release, M was interviewed by one of our advisers before being selected for work experience at our Rochester Office. Released to Changing Paths on temporary licence (ROTL) in late 2012, he left HMP Standford Hill on the Isle of Sheppey each day and commuted to Rochester.

We discovered that he was a highly skilled and experienced stone mason and had studied architecture to BA, B.Arch. and RIBA part 2. He has worked on the restoration of many historic buildings including Canterbury Cathedral, Chichester Cathedral, Kirkwall Cathedral and Blenheim Palace. We also learned how difficult it would be for him to find work on leaving prison; stonemasonry being a small world, even though his skills are greatly in demand.

With our connections to the construction industry it became apparent that there is a demand for such skills. This gave us the idea of setting up a specific course to teach stone masonry at Rochester Prison and M was keen to work with us.

Changing Paths then employed M as a Stonemasonry Tutor to deliver our apprenticeship programme as part of his ROTL activities. M was endorsed by the Governor at Rochester to work as the tutor, giving him the necessary security clearances. By the time M was released from HMP Standford Hill in May 2012, he was in our employ and has since obtained enhanced security clearance and is now key-trained. He continues to teach to a high standard and is an excellent example of what can be achieved by a small charity with know-how and experience. For individuals in M's position, finding employment would have been a challenge even for someone with his level of qualifications.

Working with M has seen a unique and much in demand skill being passed on to others which, when qualified, will change their lives. M has made a real difference and came with insight and experience as well as his practical skills. This experience has proved invaluable not just in understanding the prison regime, with all its vagaries, but also when dealing directly with offenders who respect the advice and guidance of one who has 'been there'.

The idea for a stonemasonry training facility was developed with various options being discussed. After a great deal of research the current scenario was agreed and initiated. It involved the co-operation and support not only of the Governor and staff of HMP Rochester, but also Kent Probation Trust, Wates Giving, Cathedral Works, Gallaghers (a local quarry), Weymouth College, Stonewest, the National Apprenticeship Service and Manchester College. During the planning, many hours were spent promoting the project and establishing external support from stakeholders such as Rochester Cathedral and local quarries etc. and eventually fundraising in the traditional manner began in earnest; raising the necessary funds being the most difficult part of the project.

The Rochester workshop provides Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship frameworks in stonemasonry for up to twelve men at a time. The qualifications available from the Edexcel accredited training programme include the minimum required for the construction industry, the NVQ Diploma in Stonemasonry. Apprentices training to become stonemasons with Changing Paths will work towards this nationally recognised qualification. It is based on the Construction Skills National Occupational Standards (NOS). The Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Stonemasonry (Construction) has been approved as a component for the Construction Skills Apprenticeship framework and is appropriate for employees in the construction and built environment sector.

To achieve all three level 2 diplomas will take over thirty-five weeks; the additional units will take a further twenty-one weeks. We would like our core students to be at the top of their field when they finish their apprenticeship, with the ability to carry out stonemasonry work to the highest standard in each of the required disciplines. We encourage our apprentices to be competitive by entering stonemasonry trade competitions such as Skillbuild, Duke of Gloucester gold medal, Euroskills and Worldskills.

In addition to providing progression for graduates of our workshop in Rochester Prison, a second workshop has been placed outside the walls where those released can continue their training. This facility also enables Changing Paths to support ex-offenders already released into society in the following areas:

- Pre-employment training for the construction industry
- Pre-employment support and mentoring
- Employer engagement
- Progression into employment including Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) training.

Although this project has been running successfully since June 2012, there have been a few problems along the way. Some of the problems that have been overcome include the inherent security issues when operating inside a prison, such as use of tools, prisoner escorts to and from workshops and individuals becoming key-holders (including M). The Stonemasonry Workshop itself was provided by the Governor which was fundamental because we then had a secure base in which to begin the project. The Governor was also able to endorse M as the Stonemasonry Tutor, obtaining the necessary tool cupboards for the twelve offenders on the course. Quite clearly, such foresight and confidence by HMP Rochester has paid dividends, without which Changing Paths would be restricted to running its external workshop.

The enthusiasm and dedication from the offenders participating on the training programme has been a real surprise, to the extent that they are so keen to learn that they applied to the prison governor to work through their lunch. The waiting list for apprentices is the longest the prison has ever known and one apprentice has refused a transfer to an open prison in order that he can continue his learning.

Key learning

Once the individual is accepted and on the payroll, Changing Paths continues to monitor them, being available for any problems that may arise in those early days. This has proven to be vital on many occasions and has ensured a high success rate. Further to this, employers are aware of our strict methods and are therefore more than willing to accept our referrals.

The selection and interview process employed by Changing Paths – in conjunction with both the Prison and Probation Services – ensures we have individuals who want to work and break the reoffending cycle. Some have never worked and have no work history; we give them the opportunity to change as access to employment is one of the biggest single factors that contribute to a reduction in re-offending.

Overcoming attitudes from stakeholders has also been troublesome; working the ‘why should we help prisoners’ around to ‘we would like to help Changing Paths’. Thanks to the workshops’ successes, we have seen this attitude dissolve into encouragement with great interest from local quarries, Rochester and Winchester Cathedrals, the Prince’s Trust (including HRH the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall looking at some of the offenders’ work whilst meeting Changing Paths in Kennington in February 2012) and even orders for specialist items varying from sun dials to gargoyles.

It is our experience that an employer faced with just ten applicants, one of whom is an ex-offender, would typically discount the ex-offender in the first round. Changing Paths recognised this issue and instigated a policy to minimise this effect which has resulted in more than two hundred offenders being placed into full-time employment.

The biggest obstacle we have faced, by far, is finance. Despite good Key Performance Indicators, Changing Paths cannot afford to participate in many government projects due to the inflexibility of the contracts. Employing carefully selected ex-offenders the experience and understanding we have established pays dividends. We have a fine-tuned and proven system which we believe could be adopted nationwide.

