

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.

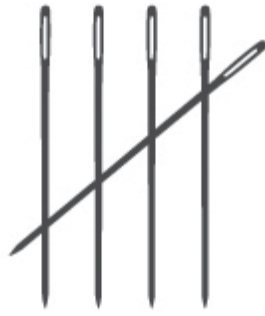
Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

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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FINE CELL WORK

NEEDLEWORK IN PRISONS

A CASE STUDY

By Katy Emck



Introduction

This case study presents Fine Cell Work's experience of developing a social enterprise through training prisoners to do commercial craft work in their cells and extending these activities into prison workshops.

Fine Cell Work (FCW) trains and pays prisoners to do skilled needlework in the long hours spent in their cells in order to foster hope, discipline and self-worth. All the training is done by skilled volunteers, recruited from the wider community. Our goals are to enable prisoners to save a nest egg that they can access on their release and for them to learn social and employment skills so they can avoid re-offending in the future.

In order to fulfil our mission to enable prisoners to reintegrate into society, we are now developing a model for accredited training and craft production in workshops – as the progression route from cell work and towards employability.

FCW has succeeded in becoming a known brand, receiving support from the general public, and is recognised for its high quality, prison-made products. We have also succeeded, on a smaller scale, in connecting cell work with training and production activities in prison workshops. Our challenge is to ensure the financial sustainability of this model, building on our links with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), prison governors and their contracted service providers.

This case study explores some of the barriers to this development and to ensuring the sustainability of our model and also makes suggestions about the further development and policy support needed to help our enterprise, and others like it, to provide employment and training opportunities for men and women in prison and on release.

Background

Fine Cell Work was set up in 1997 to train and pay prisoners to do high quality, commercial craftwork to enable them to earn and save a nest egg for release. The charity is now a £680,000 enterprise and the prisoners' work is sold to publicly-funded organisations such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and English Heritage, as well as to interior design businesses.

Twenty-eight percent of our revenue is from sales of products made by prisoners and the rest is from donations. We work with four hundred prisoners and more than three hundred volunteers each year. Forty-eight skilled volunteers visit sixteen prisons to help with training. The rest of our three hundred-strong network of volunteers help with sales around the country. In 2012 FCW received the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

The breakthrough to wider public acceptability arrived when we became a Times newspaper Christmas charity in 2009 and then had a major exhibition of prison-made work at the V&A British Quilts Exhibition in 2010. In the past five years FCW has sold £847,136 of products and commissions and paid £325,780 to one thousand, two hundred and fifty prisoners in thirty-eight prisons. Critical to the success and sustainability of this enterprise is the ability of volunteers and prisoners to manage the flow of work. We have always had more offers from volunteers and prisons than we have had the capacity, or the infrastructure, to meet. Marketing the prisoners' products to the general public has always been vital, as our growth is dependent

on being able to grow the market for our products, which would enable us to work with larger numbers of prisoners and volunteer trainers who would, in turn, produce more products.

Fine Cell Work has become a known brand with a solid base of customers and supporters. However, strong sales growth in the first ten years of our existence has slowed, while infrastructure costs have grown. We have reached a ceiling in the quantity of goods hand-embroidered in cells which we can make and sell. Our new challenge is to develop products with higher profit margins which can be sold in larger quantities to retail outlets, not just private customers. In addition, we need to harness all this productivity and profitability towards measurable training qualifications and jobs for prisoners themselves. In order to achieve this goal we need to develop and expand our operations in prison workshops.

Our experience: Fine Cell Work at HMP Wandsworth

For the past three years, Fine Cell Work has had a dedicated studio space at HMP Wandsworth. The first aim of this operation was to engage cell-workers in team work and to give them training in sewing machine skills as part of a production unit. This has been achieved, though on a small scale, and the studio has had some stunning successes. Its strength has proved to be in our network of skilled volunteers, who capture the interest of prisoners through creative work in their cells and often continue to support them when they move on to the FCW studio. Our other strength has been in employing a dedicated part-time studio manager.

The second aim was to create links with external businesses which might employ ex-prisoners or provide them with work experience placements on release. This has eluded us through our lack of capacity to research and engage with employers and employment agencies.

The FCW Wandsworth Studio has received major commissions for the V&A, English Heritage, Dover Castle, and the Jerwood Foundation. Current projects include a hand-embroidered banner for the Corporation of London, samplers for Kew Palace and a 4m by 6m wall-hanging in three parts for the Glaziers Livery Company. As well as hand-embroidered and specially designed projects such as these, prisoners at the studio also do “regular” production work. Thus in 2012, a total of five hundred and three items hand-embroidered in prison cells were machine-finished at the Wandsworth Studio.

Twenty-five to thirty prisoners are employed at the studio yearly, with an average of ten prisoners working at any one time. Eleven volunteers visit the studio to teach technical skills to prisoners and the work produced has been used to gain accredited qualifications, supported by Wandsworth’s statutory education provider. We have also piloted an upholstery course which was extremely popular, which prison managers are keen to continue, and we have now secured funding to continue this training in 2013-14.

Here is a testimonial from one prisoner who developed a line of machine-embroidered regimental products and raised money for Help for Heroes through a banner made at the Studio:

“If not for Fine Cell, would I have kept my self-respect and respect for others? I don’t think so. Will the others that follow me in the future get the same as I did? I think they will get more if Fine Cell Work is allowed to grow and get more prisoners involved then it will undoubtedly benefit them. I get asked all the time could I get them into

Fine Cell Work but when you tell them of the waiting list to get into Fine Cell it does make you think why can't we have bigger workshops and better equipment?

"If only people could see the change in people once they start work. Anger issues go. They realise that they have to concentrate on what they are doing. I have worked with Fine Cell four years and have rarely seen anyone it has not suited. When you can earn extra money and send it home or put extra money on your phone credit to allow you to speak more often to your family and friends, it helps to make you feel still part of the life you once had and that you can once again... It gives prisoners a chance to change.

"Most prisoners want to change and not come back... The encouragement that the volunteers give the prisoners is a great thing to behold. To watch a prisoner's face once they are taught a particular stitch; when they get it right it is such a boost to them, they can't wait to get onto the working side of things. Using sewing machines, embroidery machines and overlockers are just a few of the skills you can use when you leave prison..."

The studio is still very much a work in progress, but we are steadily winning credibility as a valued training and rehabilitation programme in HMP Wandsworth.

Barriers we have overcome, or are overcoming, in establishing the workshop are as follows:

1. Lack of space and equipment
2. Being viewed as a marginal, "hobby" activity outside statutory learning and training categories
3. Retaining prisoners to complete our programme of work and training
4. The difficulty of integrating an original production model involving volunteers and craftwork into broader prison policy
5. The difficulty of providing through-the-gate and post-release employment support.

The first barrier, lack of space and equipment, has been overcome through persistence, and because we pay for a staff member whose supervisory skills come in useful at a time of staff cuts. As a result, our staff member has now been formally allocated space where prisoners under her supervision can work. Access to equipment has been more difficult: in 2009 NOMS provided us with Prison Service sewing machines which were reclaimed by the prison in 2013 and we have had to raise money to provide our own equipment, including an embroidery machine.

The second barrier is being overcome by setting up a formal training scheme alongside craft production work, and partnering with A4E at Wandsworth to provide a learning framework for City and Guilds qualifications. In the past, statutory education providers have not had staff with the craft skills required for our learners. We are now overcoming this with a model which will allow education staff to work alongside our volunteers who will teach technical skills and act as mentors to prisoners.

The third barrier promises to be at least partially overcome once the training model is fully established. We have secured some commitment from prison officials to ensure that prisoners who might otherwise be transferred in the middle of the process, who wish to do City & Guilds training, can be kept at the Wandsworth Studio to do so.

Official commitment to retaining prisoners at the studio to complete the FCW programme will only be increased by our overcoming the fourth and fifth barriers, which involve the difficulty of ensuring that prisoners can gain through-the gate support on release. Our

approach is to set up a partnership and pilot project to give prisoners employed at the studio access to supported accommodation and further employment training on release. We are setting up a partnership with the Langley House Trust, so that there will be a dedicated referrals stream for studio workers to Langley House hostels in Wandsworth and Croydon.

We are also working with Langley House to set up a Croydon-based social enterprise and consortium where ex-prisoners will have access to wrap-around support services and will be able to continue their production work and City & Guilds training on release. Support services at the enterprise will be provided by a range of specialist charities working with offenders, and will address all of the NOMS seven pathways away from re-offending, with particular focus on drug, alcohol, mental health and employment support.

Key learning

Fine Cell Work has evidence from the support of our customers that the public is ready to buy prison-made products as ethical purchases. We believe that this should be more widely promoted. Our model of work, and the overwhelming number of skilled crafts people willing to volunteer in prisons, strongly suggests that volunteers can and should be more widely used in prison programmes, as they bring a personal touch that is outside the official system. This provides prisoners with an unthreatening entry to education via creativity and craftwork. Working with volunteers and undertaking paid craft work can secure trust, motivation and commitment of the prisoners, leading on to meaningful accredited employment training.

Fine Cell Work has already had considerable success in winning work and donations from publicly-funded heritage organisations as well as interior designers. We believe there is ample, further opportunity for partnerships with soft furnishings and upholstery businesses and other possible employers, and that this will create a flexible and sustainable business model. We have repeatedly seen that the private sector is keen to support prison enterprises that produce good products.

However, the policy support needed to support this development is that prisons need to become places of enterprise where obstructions to the timely delivery and collection of goods are minimised, and where visits from outside agencies and employers are actively encouraged. Prisons should have open days and enterprises such as FCW should be encouraged to bring in potential customers and employers as a matter of routine.

Likewise, volunteers should be actively recruited to assist in giving prisoners work skills and there should be strong financial incentives for enterprises such as FCW to partner with other organisations, such as Langley House Trust, to provide continuity and meaning to men and women caught within the fragmented prison system, who want to change their lives.

