

PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A CASE STUDIES SERIES



PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

GROWING SUSTAINABLE
WORK INTEGRATION
SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

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

Acknowledgements

The Home Office, Clinks, Social Firms UK would like to extend their thanks to all the organisations that participated in the programme by submitting an application or writing a case study. Thanks also to Nicky Stevenson who edited the case study series and wrote the final summary report, and to Bernard Lane and Simon Eglington (Home Office), Lesley Frazer (Clinks) and Michele Rigby (Social Firms UK), who oversaw and managed the programme.

BACK ON TRACK



Gail Walters, Amanda Govani and Stephen Russell - Midland Heart

Introduction

This case study presents Midland Heart's experience of developing an apprenticeship scheme to support young people to build their skills and resilience, ensuring that they have a stake in society. The scheme is focused on working with young people that have either taken part in, or are vulnerable to involvement in anti-social behaviour, crime and/or gang-related activities. As a result they have been excluded from mainstream employment opportunities.

The scheme has been supported by a number of partners, including the probation service, police, youth offending and training providers. These links have been essential and the partners have been extremely supportive of the scheme.

The case study details the programme activities and how they have been structured to help remove the barriers that prevent young people from accessing employment. It also identifies and shares some of the challenges that we faced and what we have learned since the programme was launched.

Background

Midland Heart is one of the largest housing, care and regeneration organisations in the country with approximately thirty-two thousand homes. It is the largest provider operating across the Midlands and the largest housing association in Birmingham with nearly fourteen thousand properties. Our supported housing sector provides accommodation, care and support for those who are homeless, including those with complex needs such as older people and those with mental health and learning disabilities. Every year we invest more than £100 million in improving existing homes, building new ones and making neighbourhoods more desirable and sought after places to live.

Our mission is to help 'transform lives and communities through housing, care ... and more!' The 'and more' agenda and building sustainable social capital are key components that drove us to develop this programme.

In August 2011, England experienced the trauma of rioting, looting and damage to properties and businesses across a number of its cities, including Birmingham. Many of the neighbourhoods that Midland Heart customers live in, were affected by rioting. These disturbances highlighted the issue of youth unemployment. It became clear that many vulnerable young people feel alienated and that one factor contributing to their poor behaviour is the lack of training and employment opportunities. Without action to support young people to take control of their lives, there is a risk that some of them will be left behind, unable to access the opportunities that are on offer.

Birmingham's youth unemployment challenge is the worst it has been for a generation. Over fifty thousand young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four are out of work. At Midland Heart, we took the decision to sit down with staff, customers and partners to talk about what could be done. The desire at the outset was to develop a response that was tangible and could be implemented quickly so that local communities could see their concerns being addressed. It was from these discussions that the Back on Track programme emerged.

Our experience: Back on Track

We launched Back on Track in April 2012 with the aim of providing opportunities to help young people into work by targeting those in Birmingham who have either taken part in, or are at risk of involvement in antisocial behaviour, crime and/or gang related activities. These are young people who would normally be at the back of the queue for employment and our aim is to help them take control of their lives and get into work.

The Back on Track programme had the specific aim of engaging with and supporting twenty young people, starting in April 2012. The approach was:

- To achieve maximum social impact with a specific response to the 2011 disturbance in Birmingham, concentrating on communities that were affected by the riots, where Midland Heart has significant housing stock
- To provide personal development opportunities for our staff by building their skills to help support the scheme
- To engage and work with external partners.

Back on Track takes a holistic approach to supporting and developing individuals through a year-long apprenticeship programme. We recognise that there are complex barriers and challenges faced by these young people, which need to be addressed if they are to succeed on the programme. It consists of a series of activities organised under the following themes:

- **A pre-apprentice programme** – this builds basic skills and ensures apprentices are ready for the programme. It is a vital step for individuals to make the transition from their current situation into a paid apprenticeship at Midland Heart.
- **An apprentice anchor** – at the heart of the programme is an apprenticeship which provides the anchor and motivation from which the trainees can build their skills and resilience.
- **Wrap around support** – a system of support wraps around the apprenticeship. This is a dedicated staff team that provides an important safety net to catch any issues which may affect the young people's chance of success; such as intensive family support, housing advice, money advice, immigration issues and employment advice.
- **Mentors** – our staff have been developed and trained as workplace mentors, this is an important role that helps establish and reinforce workplace behaviours and acts as a link to support line managers working with the young people.

Referrals are made through the probation service, the police and the youth offending service. The engagement of these partners, plus Birmingham's community leaders and training providers has been essential in the project's success.

We carried out a qualitative and evaluation of the programme, talking to apprentices, their families, our staff, our referring partners and our delivery partners. This demonstrated the following:

- A positive impact on family relationships
- Improved health and wellbeing through lifestyle changes
- A change in attitudes to friendships, and participants' friends are encouraged to join Back on Track
- Staff mentors have found developing skills with the young people to be a hugely rewarding experience, particularly those who have not experienced management before
- Midland Heart and our partners are making connections with communities that are historically hard to reach – we are working hard to tackle the inequalities faced by people in these areas

- The apprentices have been placed throughout our organisation, including in offices, which has challenged many misconceptions and prejudices they had about the nature of occupations and resulted in a positive view of working in an office environment
- Perceptions of staff and apprentices have been challenged, some behaviour such as poor time keeping has been addressed and the young people have seen what is regarded as normal behaviour in the workplace.

One apprentice commented that they 'were not used to people being nice to each other all the time and did not shout'. Another remarked how they had challenged their friends as to why they were always so negative and angry. Friendships have been forged between our staff and apprentices.

As individuals come towards the end of their twelve month placement, we are working to secure employment for the apprentices. There has been significant interest from a range of external stakeholders, including the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. We are seeking to grow the programme with our partners and have committed further funding to recruit a new round of apprentices in 2013/14.

A cost-benefit process has been developed to assess the wider benefits that this programme could have for a range of stakeholders over two years. We estimate that the programme could save up to £1.8 million spent on crime, health and welfare budgets over a two year period. That means that for every £1 invested in the delivery of this programme, there could be £5.60 worth of savings.

Feedback from referring agencies confirmed that in the absence of this intervention there was a high likelihood that these young people would commit criminal offences in the future, which for many could lead to incarceration. Figures indicate that the cost to the public purse of a typical crime where the offender is incarcerated is around £90,000. This includes legal and prison costs and non criminal justice costs, such as hospital treatment to victims of violent crimes.

Key learning

An interim evaluation of the programme identified a number of key learning points which can be summarised as:

- During the pre-apprentice stage there were some challenges in managing a relatively large group of young people working at different paces. We needed to take care to support the small number of individuals that were asked to remain on the pre-apprentice placements for longer than others.
- It was important to apprentices that they were given tasks that were not simply those that existing Midland Heart staff did not want to do. The structure and routine that apprenticeships provided, helped participants to settle in and many enjoyed feeling part of a team.
- Small things matter. For example, having their own desk was very important to a number of apprentices working in back office placements. Having a space that they could personalise appeared to offer them reassurance and reinforced their sense of belonging.
- The fact that Midland Heart has chosen to pay salaries that are in excess of the minimum requirement for apprentice placements is important in sending the right message, that individuals are valued and this provides an incentive to work rather than claiming job seekers allowance.
- As apprentices have settled into their placements, it became increasingly important to ensure that the lines of communication between the wrap around service, workplace mentors and line managers were strong, to ensure there was no overlap or confusion.

- It is important that workplace mentors access support, as there is a risk that a dependency situation is created, particularly as the relationship can be intense. This is from the perspective of the apprentices' reliance on mentor support and also from the perspective of mentors who have understandably formed a strong emotional attachment to their apprentices.

The Back on Track programme is important in showing it is possible to engage with a group of young people that are traditionally excluded from mainstream apprentice placements. However, a programme of this kind cannot simply be run as a traditional apprenticeship scheme. A key feature is the additional wrap around support that we have been able to provide, which has helped to remove the barriers that prevent vulnerable young people from entering the job market.

Back on Track also challenges the notion that apprenticeships are always best suited to practical or manual tasks and occupations. The programme has shown that the office environment can have a significant positive influence on apprentices. There is also the added value of developing skills in growing fields such customer service, administration and data entry which potentially increases their chance of obtaining employment at the end of their placement.

The benefits have not just been restricted to the apprentices. For example, workplace mentors have experienced positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction. The programme has also been important for referring partner agencies where some people expressed concern that it was difficult to engage young people on similar programmes that were seen as short term and not leading to meaningful employment.

