

# 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](http://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.



## Prison – Community – Home

By Claire Cutler-Casey

A case study of the work of the arc at  
Askham Grange supporting the  
resettlement of female offenders

## Introduction

This case study explores the work of the arc (administrative resource centre) which is a partnership between Women's Wisdom Ltd and HMP and YOI Askham Grange. The arc is a Company Limited by Guarantee (not for profit social enterprise) that works specifically with female offenders in Southampton, London, West Sussex and York and this case study pays particular reference to the work undertaken within Askham Grange Open Prison in York.

arc aims to support the reducing re-offending agenda amongst female offenders by creating sustainable social enterprises which generate their income by training female offenders in IT and business administration, enabling them to utilise their skills providing support to local businesses and third sector organisations. This support forms part of the community payback activities that are part of the sentencing process, so that offenders are seen to work in the communities against which their offences have been committed. The training provides female offenders with skills that they can use to secure paid employment upon the completion of their sentences. Work at the flagship arc based in Southampton has reduced re-offending from 27% to 6% and placed 36% of the women participants into work.

This initiative has succeeded in creating strong, sustainable working relationships with local businesses by understanding their challenges and providing access to affordable back office support services, beneficial to both businesses and offenders, enabling business growth to a point where new employment opportunities are created.

We also aim to support offenders to develop and manage their own businesses, including social enterprises, and we have had successes in helping participants into employment and self-employment, particularly one who has been supported to start her own social enterprise to provide further job opportunities to female offenders, and another who has progressed into paid employment.

Our ethos is the link between prison – community – home.

## Background

arc was established in 2011 in direct response to a call by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) for alternative community work opportunities for women on unpaid work sentences. When we researched the current provision at the time, we found that female offenders on unpaid work sentences were at greater risk of failing to report to the designated work place than male offenders, and were therefore being sent back to court for re-sentencing. This is due to various factors including:

- Unsuitability of the work offered - often this is manual work
- Unsuitability of the hours offered for unpaid work activities - often women are primary carers and need to be at home outside of school hours
- Being placed with male offenders on unpaid work teams. Data suggest that 59% of women offenders and 39% of male offenders have problems with their relationships, including poor childhood experiences, poor close family relationships and abuse.

In October 2012 an arc was opened within HMP and YOI Askham Grange to provide the same work based training activities for female offenders serving their sentences there. One of our aims was to test the feasibility of this business with a view to setting up a new and independent social enterprise that can continue this work and develop new trading opportunities in the future.

## Our experience: The arc at Askham Grange

The arc partnership at Askham Grange combines private sector enterprise, college education provision and a public sector prison. It delivers services produced by serving prisoners that are sold directly to prison enterprises, local businesses and third sector community organisations. The activities offer real work experience within the field of business administration, for women in custody. This experience provides routes to both employment and self-employment at stage two of the sentence (release into the community for paid work) and upon release.

We also aim to establish an enterprise hub to support new business start-up activities for residents at Askham Grange to prepare for self-employment.

The Askham Grange arc commenced work in October 2012. We identified a core of four women from the education department's business administration and IT cohorts. We interviewed them and they started work at the beginning of November 2012. The business started to earn income in November 2012 and our projection for self-sustainability is October 2013, just 12 months from inception.

The project involves the following parties:

- **Women's Wisdom** to provide an accredited business adviser/manager with strong employer engagement skills and experience of the arc, the prison service, release on temporary licence (ROTL) processes and activities and community based services
- **Askham Grange staff and residents**, to provide pathways to employment within the arc and to explore self-employment opportunities for residents
- **Prison Education providers** to provide education support to address the training needs identified for arc staff
- **Local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-up businesses** as a market for the services offered by the arc and providers of sustainable employment opportunities for stage two of the programme and upon release.

One of the benefits of working together in this way has been to establish a substantial change management process, which has enabled the staff and residents at Askham Grange to consider their relationships with the local business community and to assist them in developing those ties better to support the prison's future objectives and agendas.

By month six the arc achieved a healthy turnover and forecast income for the following month of £1,500. We offered work placements to eleven prisoners and have another three ready to join. We are operating at 48% capacity, which is due to increase to 61% in month eight. Success stories thus far include: one arc staff member has been released and is now running her own virtual office and networking business, having been supported with one-to-one self-employment coaching and introduced to a local networking organisation; whilst another has been released back into full paid employment. She reported a significant increase in her confidence levels and reported that: 'employing me at the arc has prepared me for my return to work'. One staff member has received an offer of stage two employment from one of our clients, whilst another will be released soon and reported: feeling 'more confident about finding what I need and more versatile and able to undertake more diverse working opportunities'.

Our relationships with local SMEs have proved remarkably successful; we have enabled them to consider what roles they might create within their businesses

and offered them an extended work trial for various members of arc, allowing both the potential employer and employee to consider working together. This has resulted in one paid work offer already with a further three in the pipeline.

Drop out rates amongst arc staff have been extremely low at around 10%, with only two of the eighteen staff employed over the period leaving before their release date. One left due to health issues whilst the other secured a more suitable placement in the prison café.

A significant success has been to support Askham Grange to allow self-employment as a paid work activity at stage two (release into the community for paid work). We have supported one serving prisoner with her horticulture business by providing her with coaching, networking and internet research support. The business is being set up as a social enterprise with a vision to employ current and former offenders as staff, to provide further opportunities for offenders to get into sustainable work. This has created the opportunity for us to assist the prison to devise and develop a policy around how to deal with residents who wish to embark on self-employment as a sustainable route to work. The work undertaken on this pilot self-employment project will also inform the ongoing policy for future prisoners and, in particular will provide progression routes for those who undertake the hair and beauty, horticulture, business administration and professional cookery courses at Askham Grange.

The process of change within public sector prisons is, at times, slow and our input here has enabled prison staff to make informed decisions more quickly. We have also introduced prison staff to local business networking groups and enabled them to participate in growing prison industries and extending employer engagement activities.

Feedback from Askham Grange staff on the social impact of this project includes the following comments:

***“The women feel valued having real work to do.”***

Head of Education

***“For the prison, the opportunity to work with the arc has meant we have been able to bring ourselves more in line with the external regional business environment which, in turn, supports us in developing our business enterprises in the prison and opportunities for work for the residents. We are being brought up to date!! Developing and working with a social enterprise allows us freedoms and flexibilities to develop our strategies to support women in effective development that we would not normally have.”***

Head of Reducing Re-offending

## Key learning

Some of the key learning points of this project have included issues relating to the culture and regulations of working in a prison environment and also some of the significant barriers to employment experienced by this cohort of female offenders. Within prison there was a particular issue pertaining to the real and perceived impact on security, relating to the use of telephones, internet, email and social networking, all of which are restricted or prohibited for prisoners who have not achieved stage 2 (release out into the community for paid work). The security issues have been addressed by various means, including discussions with policy leads from the Ministry of Justice to clarify the current policy and to identify how this might be addressed. We have also questioned some policies

to find out if it is possible for them to be updated to address current workplace needs of employers. In response to National Offender Management Service (NOMS) requirements, we have developed stringent call logging and monitoring procedures to enable the policing of all calls. Internet activity is also monitored to ensure that all sites accessed are work related.

Logistically it is important to consider the ramifications of using technology within prisons, considering how to get the technology installed and also how to build the processes to support its use.

Embedding the arc into the Askham Grange regime has not been without its challenges; prison staff have questioned our motives and those of the prison, at a time when closures and rationalisations mean that jobs may be under threat. There was also the very basic lack of knowledge and understanding about how business operates. We have addressed this by populating a notice board with details about who we are and what we do, operating an open door policy allowing staff and Independent Monitoring Board members access to the arc at any time and, most importantly, building one to one relationships within each department to ensure that we are undertaking work to support them, doing work that would otherwise not be done due to lack of resources.

Building a strong relationship with the press office is also crucial to ensure that we fully understand how to create and distribute marketing messages that are both pertinent and appropriate.

A significant challenge working with this cohort of women offenders has been unravelling the effects of institutionalisation. In order to survive within the strict regime of a prison, necessarily governed by routines and timetables, prisoners must be able to accept the reduction in autonomy, privacy and creativity of thought. Transfer to an open environment requires a significant change in their mind set with many women experiencing anxiety about their increased levels of autonomy and self-responsibility. The impact of institutionalisation can damage confidence levels and leave women doubtful of the abilities, skills and competences that they used daily in their previous lives. These can include basic social skills such as interacting with people outside the prison community. We have addressed this by offering one-to-one coaching and group training in various skills including customer service, emotional intelligence, behavioural social skills and using the telephone.

Understanding expectations is another significant barrier. The women suffer with reduced confidence levels and place very high expectations on themselves when they join the arc team. We manage this through a robust and extended induction period, ensuring that each new team member is buddied up with an existing team member to undergo handover training. The induction includes regular one-to-one reviews which continue throughout their working life within arc.

Building a strong and patient relationship with the prison has been fundamental to the success of this project. It is important to appreciate that prison rules and protocols have developed over time to reinforce a crucial and challenging part of the justice system and change is not likely to be instantaneous. That said, working with a proactive and positive team such the staff at Askham Grange has ensured that once agreed, changes are implemented quickly and efficiently. Our experience to date enables us to plan with longer lead in times and has ensured that our expectations regarding decisions and progress are modified for future projects.

It is also important to make strong working relationships with external organisations that will provide the market from which the project will generate income.

We have come into the situation very much on the ground floor, clear that part of our role is to work with the prison to help everyone to understand how to develop sustainable enterprises within prisons. It would be helpful if NOMS and the Ministry of Justice could provide more information to prison service staff, to enable them to access impartial support with developing social enterprises.

Our key learning point is that it is important to be positive and flexible, focusing on finding solutions to what, at times, can appear to be insurmountable obstacles. However, in 2011 arc received a European Social Fund Gender Equality award, so we are clearly getting something right!



