

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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Everyone needs a CleanStart



Jonathan Baker
Trafford Housing Trust

Introduction

This case study presents Trafford Housing Trust (THT)'s experience of developing Cleanstart, a social enterprise employing Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs). It sets out how we gained buy-in from partners, stakeholders and residents to grow a £300,000 turnover business, which has diverted nineteen of its thirty-eight participating PPOs into sustainable employment, with only four cases of re-offending. This is estimated to have saved over £4 million of public funds that would otherwise have been spent on trials and imprisonment. The concluding section illustrates what we have learned from running the enterprise: how we have adapted to meet client and business needs, communicated effectively to ensure positive public/stakeholder perceptions, adopted entrepreneurial methods to diversify income streams and, most importantly, worked effectively in partnership to ensure that our participants have been able to move on into sustainable employment.

Background

THT is a Registered Social Landlord that provides over 9,000 homes across the Borough of Trafford. Our vision is to be at the heart of creating neighbourhoods that are safe and clean, and that support strong communities. Despite the harsh economic climate we continue to build: creating independent living villages for older people, sustainably-heated apartment blocks, and family housing to meet needs in deprived neighbourhoods. While affordable housing remains our core offer, our size and reputation enable us to do much more. Our resident-led Community Panels invest £1 million yearly in activities prioritised by local people. Our 'Thrive' joint venture is empowering Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations to breathe new life into community assets and our flagship social enterprise, Cleanstart, diverts PPOs into sustainable employment.

In 2008 the Trust's executive team considered proposals for setting up its first social enterprise. One idea put forward was to set up a venture involving offenders working in empty homes to make them ready for new tenants. Discussion with potential partners persuaded us that the potential risks would be outweighed by the tangible benefits of diverting offenders from crime. From this point we entered into detailed talks with Greater Manchester Police and Greater Manchester Probation Trust. It was agreed that the project would have more effect if it was focused on providing employment and training opportunities for PPOs.

Our experience: Cleanstart

THT provided the bulk of the initial investment for the new social enterprise. Small additional contributions were secured from Procure Plus, a building and maintenance services consortium of social landlords from the North of England, the Council-run Safer Trafford Partnership, and Jobcentre Plus. From the outset, Cleanstart has been built on a foundation of partnership working, with clear roles for each of the major contributing organisations:

- THT employs the permanent staff team and the PPOs
- The police and probation service, assisted by Greater Manchester Employment Coalition and Jobcentre Plus, refer individuals to the programme and monitor their progress
- Procure Plus helps individuals to move on into permanent employment, and continues to provide mentorship and support over the longer-term.

Regular steering group meetings and a robust communication process ensure that the partnership runs smoothly, and any issues are addressed promptly. Cleanstart is managed by THT's senior manager for social enterprise, who is supported by three other permanent posts: a team leader, a driver and a mentor. This structure serves to bring stability and consistent support to the PPOs.

One important role has been to address misconceptions about the risk posed by employing people with convictions and utilising their skills in a service to the public, particularly in relation to our tenants. Ensuring open and positive communication was a key consideration from the outset. Our Chief Executive, Matthew Gardiner, took the lead on reassuring our key organisational stakeholders that the benefits outweighed the perceived risks. Our Executive Team led on communication and consultation with our customers. This was conducted via our five resident-led Community Panels, whose remit at the time encompassed service scrutiny, assessment of community need, and allocation of neighbourhood budgets.

As Cleanstart has developed we have continued to ensure that positive news stories have been broadcast: updates have featured in our quarterly tenant magazine; the team regularly attend neighbourhood events to distribute literature and meet the public; and the senior manager has showcased the enterprise's success at numerous resident conferences.

PPOs are referred to Cleanstart on their release from prison, and are employed on six-month contracts. In order to assist their rehabilitation and prepare them for long-term employment, each individual receives a bespoke learning and development programme incorporating vocational skills and pastoral support. All participants leave us with a Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) qualification and accreditations in Health and Safety and Sharps/Asbestos Awareness. They also receive assistance with readjustment to life outside prison, such as housing and drug and alcohol counselling.

We developed our understanding of the specific needs of PPOs through careful discussion with key partners, in particular Greater Manchester Police and Greater Manchester Probation Trust. It was agreed that by employing offenders to clean and clear empty properties, we would provide relatively straightforward work which the offenders could use as a springboard to build confidence and self-esteem, while obtaining basic skills and qualifications that would increase their chances of moving on to permanent employment.

As the PPOs reach the end of their placements, they are supported to build CVs and prepare for interviews with selected employers. These employers continue to give focused mentoring to Cleanstart's graduates as they settle into their new positions.

The core Cleanstart service remains the cleaning and clearing of empty properties in order to make them ready for new tenants. As the enterprise has developed, more services have been added including garden clearance, removal work, and preparation of tower blocks for refurbishment. All services are chargeable: smaller, regular jobs by a published pricing schedule; larger, stand-alone undertakings by negotiation.

Since the establishment of Cleanstart:

- 38 PPOs have been employed
- 30 (79%) have completed their 6-months contract
- 19 (50%) have moved into permanent employment
- Only 4 (10.5%) have re-offended.

Greater Manchester Police has calculated that, by diverting PPOs away from crime, Cleanstart has to date created over £4 million of benefit to the criminal justice system.

Cleanstart has come close to breaking even or returned a small trading surplus in each year of operation, with minimal recourse to grant funding other than the contributions made by partners at the outset. Turnover has grown year-on-year, and for 2012-13 is projected to be £300,000.

Building on the success of Cleanstart, we have recently established Rainbow, a retail operation based in a deprived neighbourhood which employs offenders and volunteers to recycle discarded household goods collected by the Cleanstart operation, which they sell at affordable rates. In addition to providing more varied employment experience for the offenders, Rainbow has reduced THT's costs for removing discarded goods by 60%, a substantial saving which will be passed on to our customers.

For the PPOs the key outcome is the opportunity to gain a foothold in sustainable employment. While the statistics give an indication of our success in this regard, it is the stories of individuals who perhaps bring it to life. The story of P, who graduated from Cleanstart to secure employment with THT as a homelessness advisor is a typical one.

P was one of the first PPOs to be referred to Cleanstart. At this point he was just 21 years of age, but had served three separate prison sentences and was living in a hostel for homeless people. P was clearly intelligent, but his low self-esteem, chaotic lifestyle and lack of understanding of the conduct expected in a work environment meant that at first he struggled to adapt to the daily routine. However, the close partnership-based support on offer quickly began to bear fruit, with the result that P not only became a valued member of the Cleanstart team but began to show serious interest in developing a career within housing. His appointment into a customer-facing role brought financial stability, and also proved a catalyst for P to achieve happiness in his home life, as he moved into a new neighbourhood with his partner and baby girl.

Key learning

Our aim for this project has been to deliver a scheme that uses real work to tackle long term unemployment and persistent offending, which has significant costs, both financial and social, to the community. As we have developed Cleanstart, we have learnt many lessons about how best to ensure the enterprise delivers its primary social objective of diverting offenders from crime.

As our partnership's confidence in working with offenders has increased, we have gradually diversified the operational offering and client base. In addition to working in empty homes, the Cleanstart service now extends to activities which brings them into contact with the public and householders. Robust, adequately resourced arrangements for offender case management and day-to-day operational oversight have ensured that this diversification has been achieved without undue complication.

In the early years of operation, we selected operatives for Cleanstart through competitive assessment centres modelled on our standard open recruitment processes. This model proved daunting for candidates who were wholly unused to the world of work. Since 2010 a less formal but more robust recruitment process has been followed, involving

one-to-one conversations between individuals and their key contacts in the police, probation service and Procure Plus. This process is delivering more positive outcomes.

Initially, our focus was on establishing robust monitoring arrangements and on supporting offenders to acquire basic workplace habits, vocational skills, and employment-ready qualifications. We soon realised that for many offenders, this was not enough: additional, more targeted support was needed to help them to address sometimes multiple and complex life issues, including resettlement into home, family disputes, debt, and habitual substance misuse. Helping offenders to deal with such issues has been perhaps our most difficult challenge. Essentially, we have learnt through experience. We have also, over time, made invaluable links to agencies who can offer more specialised support, for instance in helping offenders with addiction or debt issues.

From the outset our objective has been to ensure that Cleanstart delivers a cost-effective service. In this respect we have learnt to adopt a business-minded and entrepreneurial approach, aiming to keep costs to a minimum while identifying opportunities to increase income.

We have also learned about the importance of delivering a consistent exit strategy to ensure a high proportion of leavers move on into sustainable employment. In order to ensure continuity of support and lessen the incidence of individuals who fail to move on, since 2011 we have arranged for offenders to have monthly one-to-one meetings with dedicated and trained individuals at our partners Procure Plus, as they reach the end of their placements with Cleanstart. The same individuals continue to mentor the PPOs once they move on into permanent placements. This arrangement is so far bearing fruit: ex-offenders are settling more quickly and easily into their new employment, and instances of re-offending have become rarer.

Having secured buy-in from stakeholders and customers for the setting up of Cleanstart, and established an operational model which demonstrably delivered social and business benefits at no danger or expense to the public, we took an early decision at senior level to champion our new enterprise energetically within the local, national, and international spheres. It has been important to publicise the success of the enterprise sensitively with consideration for personal privacy and to maintain positive press coverage.

