

Innovative Approaches to Working with Ex-offenders

What is Equal?

The Equal Programme is a European Social Fund (ESF) initiative which operates across all of the European Union. The Programme aims to develop and test new ways of challenging discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work.

Equal has acted as a learning platform, developing innovative ways of tackling existing labour market problems. It has presented evidence based outcomes which could be adopted by policy makers and delivery agents at local, regional, national and European levels.

The partnership approach in Equal is based around a model of Development Partnerships (DPs), consisting of organisations with common interests and different expertise, working collaboratively to deliver shared aims and objectives.

www.equal.ecotec.co.uk

www.equal-works.com

www.esf.gov.uk



“Employment reduces the likelihood of offending”

'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners' Social Exclusion Report

At present, it is more likely that those released from custody will continue to offend rather than turn away from their offending behaviour. With current recidivism rates this pattern of behaviour comes at a cost to the UK of £11 billion per year and with the prison population numbers rising to beyond 80,000, the cost will continue to increase.

The National Equal Offender Network (NEON), involving ten Development Partnerships (DPs), has tested innovations that sustain employment, education and training opportunities for ex-offenders. NEON is working on a collaborative basis, sharing new learning and emerging practices and maximising the potential for dissemination and mainstreaming at a national and European level. In working in this way, NEON DPs have clearly evidenced that resettlement arrangements need to actively involve the ex-offender, the prison, the probation service, education and training providers, employers and the community.

Innovations developed by NEON DPs include:

- Directly involving offenders in the resettlement process
- Multi-agency cross-referral and tracking
- Developing prisoners as advisors and Peer Mentors
- Employer Engagement
- Portfolio of Achievement – recognising ex-offender learning and skill development
- New Resettlement models to ensure statutory agencies are meeting standards
- Family intervention work

Key Messages from NEON DPs

- Adopt an offender-centred approach - i.e. flexible, needs-led services, in recognition that offenders are people with complex and multiple issues and disadvantage
- Ensure services are geared to preparing ex-

- offenders for the job market by equipping them with work and life skills
- Seamless transition from custody to the community and labour market ensuring that all stakeholders are effectively engaged and supported
 - Restore Custody Plus so that short term prisoners can access services
 - Promote restorative justice models rather than prosecution
 - Provide on-going workplace support to both ex-offenders and employers
 - Relevant policies are designed to assist offenders into employment (i.e. Criminal Justice, Education, Employment) with strategies and funding closely aligned to maximise impact and effectiveness
 - A common database and evaluation framework is needed to measure the effectiveness of increasing employability, job outcomes and reduced re-offending
 - Provision for women, young people and ethnic minorities is still insufficient in scale and appropriateness – all agencies should consider how this can be addressed

Case Studies

The following case studies provide examples of support NEON DPs have provided. On their own these case studies cannot fully do justice to the complexities of beneficiaries' lives and support needs or capture the time and effort put in by DPs.

EXODUS DP – T had problems related to heavy cannabis and alcohol use and had been in trouble with the police and in and out of prison for as long as he could remember. T was supported inside prison and referred to the local Drugs Intervention Programme for drugs counselling and accommodation advice. The DP also helped with sorting out his benefits, given anger management support and helped him with his CV as well as prepare for interviews. This close contact has helped T to find work as a cleaner

www.exoduspartnership.co.uk

IMPACT DP – J has a severe and enduring mental health issue and is currently serving his sentence in custody. He joined the 'Peer mentor 2 work' pilot project, where he successfully completed the Open College Network (OCN)-accredited peer mentor training. He then became a peer mentor to a prisoner with severe mental health issues. He helped the prisoner overcome self harm issues, moving off the health care unit and onto a general wing. Since release, J has been supported into full time employment.

www.equal-impact.com

RESET DP – S was sentenced to an 18 month Detention and Training Order. She has a two year-old son who lives with his father and maintains contact with her son and his father by phone. She is worried about how she will rebuild the relationship with her son when she is released. S does not wish to return to her family home because of ongoing conflict and is reluctant to accept a room in a mother and baby unit. S has been provided with support to resolve her family and parenting concerns and is working with the DP to find suitable housing and education support on release.

www.reset.uk.net

Women into Work: MOVING ON DP – T is a young black woman and was a prisoner at HMP Downview. She embarked on BTEC digital media course at prison. She developed a wide range of skills required to design, write, produce, record and present radio programmes. In T's words 'If anyone would have said in 16 weeks I would create a website and direct and edit a mini film, no one would have believed it'. 'This course has made me think positively about my life beyond prison'. T has completed her sentence and is now working as a production assistant.

www.wiw.org.uk