

Phoenix Development Fund: Themed Report Summary

Themed Report Title: Serving and Ex-Offenders

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Context

Report based on work of six organisations supported through the Small Business Service “Phoenix Development Fund” to work with Serving and Ex-Offenders in the field of ‘enterprise development’ within the Criminal Justice System: **The Dukeries Training Agency, Business Enterprise Support, The Ideas Mine, incredit** (for two independent projects) and **The Northern Pinetree Trust**.

Lessons Learned

Three influential aspects of the environment and culture of the criminal justice system within which these projects have operated:

Every prison in England and Wales operates within same framework of explicit rules and regulations. However, each prison governor has very strong influence over their implementation: in effect creating 139 slightly different environments. Engaging the support of both the governor and the staff within a prison is key to successful delivery, outcomes, and continuing relationships for any external organisation.

Enterprise does not sit easily within the rigid framework of the criminal justice system. Whilst the idea of enterprise on release is consistent with Government’s targets for reducing re-offending, some of the innovative approaches and creative thinking it demands is very difficult to establish.

Prison location and the destination prisoners go to on release has enormous impact on success of any programme that tries to form a continuous support service for an offender from ‘the in’ (in custody) to ‘the out’ (an offender’s destination). Only a very small minority of offenders serve their sentence in a prison that is geographically close to home so to be successful, maintaining support on release is critical.

Outcomes/Findings

Inside Prisons

Wide range of approaches has been adopted under this theme to achieve the objectives of the projects. In all cases, staff engagement and joint planning critical to ensure that this work fits individual prison regime and that activities planned can be staffed appropriately.

Outside Prisons

Continued support for offenders after release is critical to their continuing success and motivation. The Report sees PDF as an inspired and enlightened initiative whose achievements should be recognised and replicated.

The Report finds that service users – prisoners and ex-prisoners - should always be included at an equal level in planning and delivery. They bring wealth of experience, understanding and knowledge of what can and cannot work within this very special environment.

Report also finds more care should have been taken in selection, monitoring and support of projects that benefited from the fund.

Useful points for the Project

The Report finds that relationships that have been developed between projects in this theme and the relevant Government departments are very positive and are likely to continue e.g. the National Steering Group, which was originally established to support the work of **Business in Prisons**, is now evolving into an authoritative body, which will provide opportunities for debate with Government policy makers on key issues. This means that there is an opportunity for some of work, which has begun under the auspices of the PDF to continue.

In order to effect change and influence future policy, engaging the support of people at the most senior level in Government and Ministerial Offices has been crucial. Accordingly, projects have adopted different targeting and marketing methods in order to create an environment of awareness, understanding and potential for solutions that fit within a number of crosscutting themes for government. Four of the projects were already part of a National Steering Group focused on enterprise in prisons that also included representatives of the PDF, SBS and Home Office.

The overwhelming response from projects when asked about the role of the Small Business Service Phoenix Development Fund was that none of the initiatives would have taken place on this scale, but for Phoenix, and in most cases, would never have taken place at all.

The impact of PDF has been significant, not least because its ethos and enlightened management fostered a level of creativity and innovation, which is unusual in Government-funded initiatives. It has also functioned as an 'honest broker', uniting departments over projects which individually they may have struggled to support.

Policy and Service Delivery Implications

- How could SBS help to ensure that Business in Prisons meets its goal?

- How could the impact of PDF be embedded, given that the role of SBS has moved further away from delivery and given that funds are limited?