



A helping hand

Bounce Back's Fran Findlater explains how providing ex-offenders with training and work as qualified painters and decorators is drastically reducing reoffending rates and providing a loyal and enthusiastic workforce.

It is widely reported that the majority of reoffending occurs shortly after a prisoner is released, which has an associated cost to the government – and, in turn, the taxpayer – of around £11bn per year. With the reoffending rate as high as 70% when ex-prisoners have no job to go to and 88,000 people currently in prison, we felt that action needed to be taken and so we set up Bounce Back.

Bounce Back's ethos is to use a programme of education and training to bring ex-offenders back into paid employment in painting and decorating. Our team passionately believe that a job (and income) on release from prison is fundamental to success in coping with day-to-day life and preventing re-offending. Similarly we wholeheartedly believe in the ability of people to change, transforming lives by offering a hand up, rather than a handout.

The organisation works with several prisons in London including HMP Wandsworth, HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMP Brixton. The process has developed to include a visible presence in prisons with a Job Support Crew who inspire, encourage and support candidates to the end of their sentence through training and qualifications. They also provide them with an understanding of what is required of them on release so as to carefully manage their expectations.

Training courses

Harnessing the training courses already in place within the individual multi-skills or job club in the prison, Bounce Back tailors the courses to suit the jobs available on release. In addition, all information about the individuals is gathered so each member of the team comes with a history that is transparent and free

from any element of risk.

On release, the candidates are inducted at the Bounce Back centre in Canning Town, London where they complete their training and gain further qualifications up to NVQ Level 2. A number of paint and wallpaper companies invite the team to learn about their products and methodology, so they are equipped to handle a variety of work.

Once training is complete, the team take to the streets on a fleet of branded tricycles, working on voluntary painting and decorating projects in the local community. This gives them a brief period of work experience prior to paid employment that allows them to develop and apply the skills learned during training.

The foundation – which runs the prison recruitment, training and the voluntary work out in the community – is funded through trusts, foundations

and some payment-by-results statutory funding. It is our ultimate aim that the social enterprise – i.e. the commercially run painting and decorating company we have formed – will fund the work of the foundation.

Since its inception, the focus has been to build a professional, commercial painting and decorating company offering competitive rates and a high standard so we can compete on a level playing field with other companies.

This has been achieved with our teams carrying out a number of significant projects for developers who are regenerating housing in London and the home counties, and working on subcontracted jobs for major groups including The Peabody Trust, and City West Homes in partnership with Axis Europe plc.

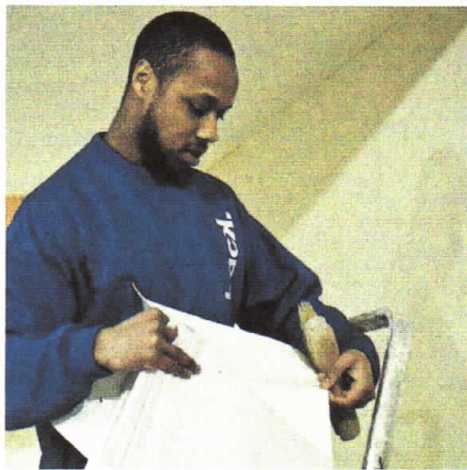
A variety of work

Work within the housing sector has been varied – for instance, 35 employees worked for City West Housing Trust, Pimlico, London on a seven-month repair, maintenance and refurbishment contract, painting 120 housing units inside and out. The programme included masonry repair and the application Class O fire-retardant paint and anti-graffiti glazing.

Scott Hammond of City West was pleased with the result: "As clerk of works I monitor quality and any other issues that arise from site. I visited the contract on a regular basis as all the work requires stage inspections and handovers are issued for every application. The contractors are aware of my procedures and they know I am rigorous with my inspections.

"I did not experience any concerns regarding Bounce Back. I have found all to be polite and courteous and so did the residents from the estate, and the work that has been completed has been of the same standard if not better than some of the full-time decorators on site."

23 Bounce Back employees are currently working for Circle 33 Housing Trust in North London, painting a number of housing units that are undergoing refurbishment. Here, they are working externally at height as well as on internal paintwork.



Ex-offender Gavin worked on this project and said: "It was a great experience enabling me to improve my skills, including working on cradles. It also gave me the opportunity to bond with other team members and learn new techniques from the supervisors."

There have been some significant transformations with our ex-offenders and those who have demonstrated potential have succeeded in ways they never thought possible. For instance, Weldeab was one of the first participants on the programme in 2011 having lost his driving licence, which meant he couldn't continue his work as a delivery driver.

Two years later he is an integral part of Bounce Back. Such was his commitment to the project that we sponsored him to gain the qualifications needed to become the full-time trainer. He now runs the training courses at the centre.

Supporting people

To date, over 100 people have been through the programme at a rate of six-to-eight new candidates a month. Of these, 80% have been supported into paid employment, helping them with the provision of on-site essentials such as their CSCS card, UTR number and CIS membership.

The programme has been rewarded with success and we have evidence that what we are doing works, with only 10% of our candidates reoffending and acknowledgement from judges that we provide a solution



to reducing reoffending, so our message is spreading.

It costs between £47,000 and £90,000 to keep someone in prison for a year and £29,000 to keep them on benefits. To train someone through Bounce Back costs just £2,500. Providing ex-offenders with painting and decoration skills is a far better solution and one that can be extended to many construction trades and to other industry sectors.

● Fran Findlater is CEO of The Bounce Back Foundation.

● For more information about Bounce Back visit www.bouncebackproject.com.

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