



Viewpoint

Giving ex-offenders training and work is reducing re-offending rates and providing a loyal workforce, says **Fran Findlater**

It is widely reported that most re-offending occurs shortly after a prisoner is released, which costs the government and, in turn, the taxpayer around £11bn a year¹. With the re-offending rate as high as 70 per cent when ex-prisoners have no job to go to² and 88,000 people currently in prison³, we felt that action needed to be taken. That's why we set up the Bounce Back Foundation.

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 believes that a job (and income) on release from prison is fundamental to 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, not a hand out.

The Foundation works with several prisons in London, including HMP Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs and HMP Brixton. Its process has developed to include a visible presence in prisons, with a job support team member interviewing prisoners in custody up to three months prior to release. Where painting and decorating training is already offered in prison, Bounce Back quickly identifies those individuals who are demonstrating enthusiasm on which they can build.

Once a candidate has been selected, he is mentored once a week by a Bounce Back Crew member. He is encouraged and supported to the end of his sentence and provided with an understanding of what is required of him on release, to carefully manage his expectations.

Harnessing the training courses already in place, Bounce Back tailors the training to suit the jobs available on release. Prisoners are given an opportunity to learn a new trade or to upskill an existing one. They take comfort from the fact that their training will result in a job and, when training does lead to work, it changes their mind set – it gives them a purpose.

In addition, all information about them 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, where they complete their

training and gain further qualifications. Once training is complete, they take to the streets on a fleet of branded tricycles, working on painting and decorating projects.

Since its inception, Bounce Back's main commercial focus has been to build a highly professional painting and decorating company offering competitive rates and a high standard to compete on a level playing field with other companies. This has been achieved, with the teams carrying out a number of significant office refurbishment projects for private companies and developers regenerating housing. The teams also work on sub-contracted jobs for organisations including Axis Europe plc and The Peabody Trust.

There have been some significant transformations – our ex-offenders and those who have demonstrated potential have succeeded in ways they never thought possible. For instance, Weldeab was one of the programme's first participants and now he runs the courses for new inductees working towards their NVQ level 2. In 2012 he mentored approximately 100 ex-offenders.

More than 130 people have been through the programme at a rate of six to eight new candidates a month. Of these, Bounce Back has supported 80 per cent into paid employment, helping them with on-site essentials such as their CSCS card, UTR number and CIS membership.

Our programme has been rewarded with success and we have evidence that what we are doing works – only 10 per cent of our candidates re-offend and judges have acknowledged that we provide a solution to reducing re-offending.

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

References

- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/163377/2012-compendium-reoffending-stats-analysis.pdf
- ibid
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-figures>

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