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ES Jobs

Helping the unemployed get back on their feet

THE economy, skills shortages, immigration and benefits – all issues that are dominating General Election debates. However, it is charities and not-for-profit social enterprises, rather than politicians, that are coming up with some of the most innovative and successful solutions to help tackle these issues.

The charities are providing these hard-to-employ groups with vital skills to help them secure work and get off benefits, thus negating the need for employers to look overseas.

"The construction sector alone will need about 13,000 painters and decorators by 2018," says Francesca Findlater, CEO of the Bounce Back Foundation, a social enterprise which provides training for ex-offenders and serving prisoners so they can meet some of this demand for skilled workers in the sector.

With half of all of those released from prison reoffending, a job can dramatically cut the reoffending rate, saving the £35,000 a year it costs to keep someone in prison, while also meeting employer demand.

Ex-offenders are not the only minority group that has missed out on economic recovery. Last month's unemployment figures revealed a 50 per cent rise in long-term unemployment for young ethnic minority people in the UK since 2010.

There are now more than 40,000 16-24 year-olds from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who are long-term unemployed. The homeless, the older, long-term jobless and single mothers are other groups that often find it harder to get back – or into – the workforce. Once again it is the third sector that's having some of the greatest success in finding these groups work.

FROM PRISON TO PAINTING

Those leaving prison often struggle to find work, which is part of the reason why half of them will reoffend.

Yet they are often keen to retrain. Construction alone will create 224,000 jobs by 2019, according to the Construction Industry Training Board.

Each year about 70,000 are released from prison. So the maths add up.

"I met the person in charge of resettlement at Wandsworth

Productive work: Ann Summerhayes, Media for Development



A lack of skilled workers could put the brakes on economic growth – so why not help those who find it more difficult to secure work? Social enterprises and charities are offering innovative and successful solutions, writes **Niki Chesworth**

Prison and it changed my attitude to employing ex-offenders," says Findlater.

"We decided to employ a few as interns at our graphic design company, but when clients asked to borrow our painting and decorating team we decided to create the social enterprise so we could train more of them up. We explained to our clients that our painters and decorators were all ex-offenders and the fact that clients were so accepting has helped change perceptions.

"We are now an accredited training organisation and provide painters and decorators for offices, private homes and commercial premises, and have since set up a training centre in HMP Brixton as well as our training centres in the community in Kennington and Canning Town."

HMP Brixton also offers a number of other resettlement training schemes including The Bad Boys Bakery, which is based inside the prison teaching baking skills and helping prisoners to resettle and find work once they are released.

Media for Development, a not-for-profit organisation based in Hackney, offers opportunities for training and work through its production company Inside Job Productions, which began by training women offenders out on temporary licence in admin and film production work.

"Of the 10 I am still in touch with, none have reoffended, two run their own businesses and one went on to work in TV production," says managing director Ann Summerhayes. "So it is effective. The fact that they have worked hard with us, have a good reference, have



Back on track: Rashel Hussain, a veteran of the Bounce Back Foundation, started training while still in prison – he has since set up his own decorating business

FROM HOMELESS TO APPRENTICE

ST MUNGO'S Broadway recently celebrated getting its 100th member with "lived experience" of homelessness back into work through its client apprenticeship scheme, which gives 12 months' work experience and on-the-job learning in a St Mungo's Broadway project. Apprentices also undertake social care qualifications at the same time.

Kate Thomson, apprenticeship coordinator at St Mungo's Broadway, says: "We work with many people who, for a variety of reasons including poor health, lack of qualifications or unstable housing, find it difficult to work. Our apprenticeship scheme helps to address these barriers, working closely with people to achieve their employment goals to

ultimately rebuild a life away from homelessness."

Waad Ahmadi, St Mungo's 100th Apprentice, says: "The apprentice programme has helped me so much in such a short space of time. I am now in a stable full-time job, gaining knowledge every day through training and through the practical work at my project."

learned more skills and learned how to work and do a job with training, shows there is hope."

About a third of the staff at St Giles Trust are ex-offenders, who now work to support prisoners and ex-offenders through its advisory scheme. The charity trains about 25 people a year.

"We believe it is worth giving them a chance as they will go that extra mile," says spokesperson Tamsin Gregory.

YOGA FOR SINGLE MUMS

How do you engage single mothers who have been out of the workforce for years in a back-to-work programme and give them the confidence in themselves so that they start to believe they can actually get a job? The answer is Yoga. That is the innovative solution that the social enterprise Step Ahead

is pioneering. And it works. "Our economy needs to upskill the unemployed or we will hit a brick wall," says Jackie Bedford, chief executive of Step Ahead. "That is where we step in, approaching employability from the employer's perspective, giving trainees the skills that employers want. There are hundreds of thousands of people on income support who are over 50 or lone parents, who lack the confidence and skills to get into the workplace.

"Nationally, success rates for getting them back into work are very, very low and when invited to an employability course many will make an excuse – such as saying that their child is sick. But they do engage with the yoga as they are getting a free class from an instructor. At the same time we give them employability training, help them

to write a CV, talk to them about how to present themselves at interview and advise them on what jobs to go for.

"Our scheme started as a pilot in Lambeth and Southwark last September and we have recently started to help women who are either lone parents or over 50 in Westminster, too. More than a third are now in work."

Fatumata Sannoh, 37, is one of those who has benefited. After two years of unemployment, the single mother was losing hope and battling a health condition.

Following Yogability she secured work as a cashier at her local supermarket and says: "I had not done yoga before so I thought I would give it a go. I was struggling and stressed before, but now I am making a life for myself and my children are very excited."

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