

Can social enterprise reduce reoffending?

The scale of imprisonment in England and Wales has reached unprecedented levels in the last decade reaching over 87,000 in September 2011 (www.justice.gov.uk).

A tough stance on law and order adopted by New Labour, an emphasis upon punishment over rehabilitation and calls for greater public protection

from dangerous and prolific offenders (Garland, 2001, Pratt, 2007) have culminated in a 60% increase in the prison population over the last decade (Home Office, 2005). Such vast increases however have not facilitated reductions in reoffending. Data collated by the Ministry of Justice (2010) suggests that prison is failing to rehabilitate offenders and reintegrate them back into civic society. Of those

offenders who were charged or who received a court order in 2000, 43% were reconvicted within one year, 55% were reconvicted within two years, and 68% were reconvicted within five years (ibid.). It has been further suggested that individuals who are reconvicted within two years of their release from prison will actually have received an average of three further convictions (Social Exclusion Unit 2002).



Horticultural Acumen, Co. Durham.



Such high recidivism rates coupled with the staggering financial costs of mass imprisonment and the social costs of reoffending upon victims of crime (Newburn, 1993, Walklate, 2007) has led to an increased emphasis being placed upon inter-agency co-ordination amongst statutory agencies and increased co-operation with voluntary and community organisations in a bid to break the cycle of re-offending and imprisonment (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002, McEvoy, 2008). The recent

introduction of social enterprises within the prison and probation setting is symptomatic of this trend.

In spite of the growing number of programmes working within the criminal justice sector (NOMS, 2009), there is however limited knowledge and evidence of the impact of social enterprise upon reoffending, diversion from crime, or their potential social impact on local communities. In December 2010, Professor Maggie O'Neill from the Department of

Applied Social Sciences at Durham University and Dr Faye Cosgrove from the Department of Social Sciences at Sunderland University were commissioned by Acumen Community Enterprise Development Trust and the ESRC to conduct a review of the academic and sector based literature surrounding the link between social enterprise, employment and reoffending. This briefing outlines key findings of the review and implications for the future development of social enterprises in the UK.

What is Social Enterprise?

Social enterprises are commonly defined as “a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners” (DTI, 2002, 13).

According to Pearce (2003) social enterprises share five defining features;

1. Having a social mission or purpose, for example, creating employment, training or the provision of local services,
2. Achieving that social purpose by engagement, on some level through the production of goods or services within the marketplace,
3. Holding assets and wealth for the benefit of the community rather than for the benefit of individuals,
4. Ensuring the democratic involvement of members of the organisation within its governance
5. Having accountability to members of the enterprise venture and the wider community.

Social enterprises can therefore be an innovative means of finding longer term solutions to assisting people long disconnected from the jobs market, in finding a route into work, employment, education and training.

Social Enterprise, Reoffending and Employment

Finding stable employment is of fundamental importance in the prevention and/or reduction of offending (Crow, 1989, Farrington et al, 1996, Maruna, 2001). A recent review of evidence provided by Shea (2005, cited in Howard League, 2008) suggests a more modest rate of prisoner unemployment rate of six to ten times higher than the national average.

Unemployment rates and subsequent rates of social exclusion are even worse for women in prison (Corston, 2007); a survey of 567 women prisoners conducted by Hamlyn and Lewis (2000; 19) reported that only three in ten women had been in full or part time employment immediately

prior to entering prison, 39% had not worked outside the home in the year preceding imprisonment, and 23% had not worked for over five years. Even where offenders do have some form of employment experience prior to their imprisonment, very few men or women are engaged in fairly paid, fulfilling work (Gill, 1997).

Given the significance of employment to desistance, social enterprises currently working with ex-offenders and/or those at risk of offending aim to provide cost-effective, realistic employment and training opportunities to those marginalised from the labour market in order to build self-esteem and confidence and facilitate their reintegration into civic society.

They are often perfectly placed to work with offenders due to their experience in working with socially excluded clients, flexibility in delivery and ability to provide innovative, meaningful work opportunities to offenders.

Unlike public sector agencies that can be paternalistic and hindered by bureaucracy, social enterprises are driven by a philosophy of self-help and autonomy. This encourages offenders to take ownership and responsibility for their rehabilitation, and being positioned outside the CJS means they can often better reintegrate offenders back into civic society by enabling them to 'give something back' to local communities.

Social Enterprise in the Criminal Justice System

There are currently 130 prisons and 37 probation services in operation in England (NOMS, 2009), however exactly what proportion of these are working with the VCSE sector is currently unknown.

A recent report by NOMS (2009) involving 91 respondents working in 94 (72%) prisons and 39 respondents working across all probation services was unable to ascertain the precise numbers of social enterprises working within prisons or in partnership

with probation services (NOMS, 2009), although the report estimates

At the time of writing NOMS reported that 62% of probation services, 40% of which were working with social enterprises to fulfil the requirements of Community Payback Orders, and 53% of prisons were working with one or more social enterprises.

Research undertaken by NOMS (2009) identified of 57 social enterprise organisations working in the offender management sector at the time of writing, twenty-six were

working directly with prisons, and 21 directly with probation services.

Organisations were funded through a variety of means but more commonly through a contract or grant. Most social enterprises defined themselves as being economic based, education, employment and training (ETE) social enterprises conducted for the purpose of reintegration, but other NOMS priority areas, including 'Attitudes, thinking and behaviour', 'Finance, benefits and debt' and 'Drugs and alcohol' were also identified (NOMS, 2009: 70).

Key Findings

Despite the level of involvement in the CJS and potential in tackling recidivism, there is a limited evidence base to suggest that social enterprises are having an impact on reoffending. There are a number of possible explanations for the limited availability of impact data, including:

- a lack of capital and internal expertise to carry out evaluations,

- impact data not being a priority of funding bodies and
- The non-contractual operation of a lot of social enterprises

When evaluations have been undertaken these have largely focused on the outputs – such as the delivery of training programmes and heightened compliance with community orders – rather than specific outcomes relating to arrest

or reconviction. The review did however identify a number of social enterprises operating in partnership with prisons and probation services which were experiencing success in either supporting offenders into employment, education and/or training, providing financial and family support or diverting young people away from crime. A selection of these are identified and illustrated below.

Fine Cell Work

(www.finecellwork.co.uk)

Fine Cell Work is a registered charity that teaches inmates needlework enabling them to contribute to the production of tapestries, quilts, rugs and cushions whilst locked in their cells.

- Prisoners benefit from the project in a number of ways. Firstly, they benefit psychologically from

participating in creative work, helping them to tackle depression and boredom. Secondly, they are able to achieve a sense of value and purpose through their participation in a collective enterprise that contributes to supporting future inmates. And thirdly, improved self-esteem resulting from their ability to generate an income for their release or for relatives whilst they are in

prison supports them in addressing their offending behaviour.

- 300 prisoners held in 26 prisons across the country are engaged in the project, of which 80% are men.
- Each participating inmate typically works 20 hours per week on their needlework, earning up to £500 per year for their contribution. In 2008, 403 inmates earned a total of £61, 890.

'This research is important for policy makers and practitioners alike: it provides a benchmark for current learning in the field and will, the authors hope, provide a platform for informed and thoughtful discussion and debate'.

John Sargent

Horticultural Acumen, County Durham

(<http://www.acumentrust.org.uk>)

Acumen Community Enterprise Development Trust delivers employment, skills and enterprise support across some of the most disadvantaged communities in the north of England.

- With over 40 employees, the group has developed a number of social

enterprises ranging from providing IT support to community organisations, a café and gardening and landscaping services. In 2009 it began working with ex-offenders through horticulture at their 10 acre planting nursery in Peterlee, County Durham.

- Supported by 9 permanent members of staff and an additional 6 individuals accessed through the Future Jobs fund, the social

enterprise sells most of its products to the wholesale market and garden centres to the value of £200,000 per annum.

- Horticultural Acumen currently works with 15 offenders, one day per week as part of their Community Payback orders. In addition to gaining valuable work experience, individuals are also given the opportunity to achieve a NVQ Level 1 certificate in Horticulture.

Work This Way, HMP Ford, West Sussex

(www.workthisway.org.uk)

Founded in 2007 in HMP Ford, Work this Way aims to provide training, work experience, employment opportunities and support to prisoners approaching the end of their sentence “to improve offenders’ employability, help offenders into employment and reduce the risk of their re-offending” (www.workthisway.org.uk).

Prisoners not only receive accredited, vocational training and work experience through real contract work providing them with invaluable references, but are given support to improve their self-esteem, interpersonal skills and confidence to assist them in securing a job on release.

420 training places have been provided to over 130 offenders.

Work this Way’s Waste Oil Recycling Project (WORP), established in December 2008, has developed a unique production

system to convert used cooking oils from prison kitchens and local businesses into clean biodiesel, resulting in the UK’s first accredited training in the production of biodiesel from waste cooking oil.

Cited as an example of good practice, Work this Way has won the West Sussex Social Enterprise Network 2009 Award, has received a nomination in the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) 2009 Big Green Challenge.

Blue Sky Regeneration and Development

(www.blueskydevelopment.co.uk)

Founded in 2005 by the charity Groundwork Thames Valley, Blue Sky Regeneration and Development seeks “to help break the cycle of reoffending and achieve long-term benefits for society” (ARCS, 2007: 2) by providing temporary employment opportunities in grounds maintenance and recycling exclusively for ex-offenders. Ex-offenders are also given practical assistance in dealing with housing issues and in securing further training opportunities and day-to-day motivational support to help them into more stable employment.

- In 2010, the project conducted maintenance improvements to over 2m square metres of land and diverted 7,000 tonnes of materials from going into landfill sites.
- Although originally located within the Heathrow area in Greater London, the project has expanded into a national organisation employing over 400 ex-offenders (www.socialenterprise.org.uk).
- Blue Sky’s commitment to marketing, quality service provision and evaluation has helped to secure 60% of its running costs through commercial contracts with local authorities and private companies.

- 300 ex-offenders have completed 6 month contracts since October 2005
- In 2009/10, 70% of employees completed their involvement with Blue Sky with an accredited vocational qualification
- 48% of past participants were in full time employment three months after leaving Blue Sky
- Only 15% of those employed on the project have reoffended
- In March 2011, Blue Sky Development and Regeneration won the English Social Enterprise of the Year award for its innovation and excellence in tackling reoffending.

Storybook Dads, HMP Dartmoor, Devon (<http://www.storybookdads.co.uk>)

Based within HMP Dartmoor, Storybook Dads was set up in 2003 to provide a service to imprisoned fathers whereby they could record a story for their children onto a CD.

- The project has three principal objectives. Firstly, to create a workable model that could be efficiently copied in other establishments. Secondly, to equip prisoners with improved literacy and IT skills and to create
- a qualification for prisoners, as audio editors, that would subsequently support resettlement, employment and prevent reoffending on release. And thirdly, to enable prisoners to establish or maintain a bond with their child whilst they are in prison with a view to reducing the trauma of having a parent incarcerated.
- The social enterprise now delivers an OCN Level 2 qualification in Sound and Audio Production at Dartmoor and absent parents also have the opportunity to access parenting courses to support family relationships.
- With support from the prison service in providing audio-editing facilities and securing funding from charitable foundations and trusts, Storybook Dads has extended from Dartmoor prison and now operates in over 90 other prisons in England and Wales, including 10 women's prisons under the sister project Storybook Mums.
- The project has supported 2000 fathers and mothers to record stories for approximately 4000 children since its inception in 2003.

International Lessons

The review also involved an examination of social enterprises and co-operatives working with offenders and prisoners in North America and Europe.

These schemes differ from the social enterprises outlined in that they are

not exclusively focused upon the employment or social inclusion of ex-offenders, but instead tend to have a broader target population encompassing economically disadvantaged people and excluded and marginalised groups. However there are examples of enterprising

activity in North America, Italy and Sweden that target individuals in prison, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending (for example, substance users, marginalised young people) and present valid lessons for the development of social enterprise in the UK.



Photo: Kurt Driver

United We Can, Vancouver, Canada

United We Can, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

(www.unitedwecan.ca)

Starting in 1995 through the 'United We Can Bottle Depot', the project is an example of a sustainable, environmental social enterprise that has balanced economic imperatives with central social purpose. United We Can aims to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged people, including the homeless and substance misusers, living in an impoverished and stigmatised area of Vancouver through a recycling scheme that uses non-motorised foot

and cycling carts known as Urban Binning Units (UBU). Employees or 'binners' use UCUs and shopping trolleys to collect recyclable materials from local businesses, residential areas and special events, before returning the items collected to United We Can for recycling. UWC is open 365 days per year and the social enterprise also includes a 'computer shop', a 'bike project' and 'Solefoods urban farm'.

- Between 750-900 'binners' work to collect recyclable materials to process through United We Can each day
- The project has created job opportunities for 117 people on either a full or part time basis

- Most of the collectors typically earn \$20-30 per day for their efforts, working within individual territorial boundaries (ibid.), up to 10-12 hours each day, up to 7 days per week.
- The social enterprise model provided by United We Can facilitates a sense of security and social cohesion through the attachments individuals form with specific territories within the community.
- In addition, the scheme has achieved numerous awards in recognition of its contribution in tackling poverty and social exclusion in the city of Vancouver.

InsideArt Co-operative, Fraser Valley, British Columbia, Canada

InsideArt is an art marketing cooperative whose members are predominantly current and former inmates incarcerated in federal prisons in the Fraser Valley. Dealing exclusively in fine art and crafts produced by its members via an on-line virtual gallery, the program is the first of its kind in Canada.

- The primary goal of the program is to support ex-prisoners to have

less dependence on social welfare agencies to be productive members of society on their release from prison. Individuals not only gain an income from their endeavours supporting their transition from prison, but also gain training in the establishment and operation of a legitimate business enterprise, learn the values of responsibility and self-sufficiency and gain invaluable work experience. Income generated through their work contributes towards business expenses, their room and board, and is subject to income tax.

- Artists are also supported in their reintegration into the community. A number have donated pieces of work to non-profit organisations including The Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Breast Cancer Foundation.
- InsideArt is an innovative idea but is in the early stages of its development. The current lack of information on the social impact of the venture prevents any conclusions to be made regarding its success in tackling reoffending of its members.

Co-operativa Alice, Milan, Italy

(<http://www.cooperativaalice.it/>)

Established in 1992, the innovative Co-operativa Alice, located in Milan's San Vittore prison, provides opportunities for female prisoners on day release to make costumes for

theatre and television with the aim of supporting their transition to employment on release. Co-operativa Alice has also produced costumes for the La Scala opera house in Milan and have made accessories for the premier football team Inter Milan.

- The project claims a number of indicators of success, including

the launch of their own womenswear line 'Jailcats', the successful employment of some of the women in the fashion industry, and above all, a very low recidivism rate.

- According to Hooper, (2007), of the 100 plus women who have joined since Alice was founded, only one has gone back inside.

Basta Arbetskooperativ, Stockholm, Sweden

(<http://www.basta.se>)

Located in Nyqvärn, 40 km southwest of Stockholm, Basta Arbetskooperativ's members have overcome their addiction and now run a self-supporting business. Established in 1994, the initiative provides opportunities for responsible work in the

form of environmental cleaning, carpentry and construction for substance users as part of their rehabilitation.

- An evaluation conducted by Meeuwisse (2001, in Hedin et al, 2005) into the roles and relationships developed through the project however is disappointing; with Meeuwisse stating (ibid) that Basta was no better or worse than other programmes of treatment for substance users. However, where

Basta differs from other programmes is that people are able to “live their lives in a miniature society, with real work and tasks which demand responsibility” (Hedin et al, 2005) where people are able to develop a new sense of purpose and sense of belonging.

- After ten years, the social co-operative model developed at Basta has been replicated at a second location near Gothenburg.

Implications for Success

The review identified that social enterprises were more likely to experience stability, develop and have an impact on the lives of offenders when:

- Embedded within the institutional structures of the prison and integrated within NOMS core standards and targets.
- Operating in a way that complements traditional prison based interventions.
- The enterprise was approached as a business, had been able to develop and diversify services to offenders and local communities and were no longer dependent upon funding for their survival
- Personal values of entrepreneurs and members of staff were balanced with the demands of the market, for example, many social enterprises have engaged offenders undertaking community

payback despite misgivings they might have with the disciplinary nature of the scheme.

- They had developed an acute understanding of the pressures, challenges and stigmatisation faced by ex-offenders following a conviction or time spent in prison
- Democratically governed whereby ex-offenders were involved in the operation and development of the project. Ex-offenders are more likely to commit to and identify with the social mission of the project and their own rehabilitation when included in decision making processes and when given a say in the way in which profits are reinvested.

In a climate of austerity and where the procurement of rehabilitative services is overshadowed by ideas of payment by results and social impact, social enterprises will only survive if they are able to self-sustaining by balancing social objectives with financial imperatives,

if they operate under the principles of risk management and are willing to work with offenders across all offence categories, and most importantly, if they are committed to robust evaluation to demonstrate their contribution in supporting rehabilitation and the reduction of reoffending. Without a commitment to the above, it is unlikely that social enterprises will become embedded within the criminal justice system.

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'Social enterprises seek to create cost-effective, realistic employment and training opportunities for offenders, build self-esteem and confidence, and facilitate offender reintegration into civic society'

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