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Novas Scarman Institute Innovation Briefings – Offenders Series No.2

This series of briefings highlights key aspects of our work with people in contact with the criminal justice system.

Through these we focus on identifying innovative approaches, highlighting what works, and what needs to change.

This briefing focuses on barriers to employment, from the perspective of offenders

From our survey of 107 people using our services who had been in prison or subject to a community order, we found that:

- The biggest barrier individuals felt they faced in getting a job was employers' attitudes
- 64% said they hadn't received any help to prepare them for a job while in prison

Their priorities are clear:

- 80% want training to gain a qualification
- 70% want a mentor to support them to achieve their goals

We offer a range of learning programmes, routes into employment and social enterprise development that work for people with an offending background.

We want to develop these, in partnership with others, to offer more people with an offending background, or at risk of offending, a better chance to realise their potential, and make a positive contribution in their communities.

“ I have made great progress since I was referred to the Novas Scarman Employment Works traineeship scheme. I really wanted to help people whose shoes I was once walked in. I got given the chance to prove myself, and started a traineeship in a Housing Support role.” (Trainee who had an offending background and is now set to move into a permanent job).

We call for more investment in the Third Sector, to lead in delivering innovative solutions, which help break the re-offending cycle and bring real change.

What offenders say - headline findings from our research:

We interviewed 107 people who were homeless, or living in our hostels, or who had been supported to move into and sustain their own accommodation.

Asked what opportunities would help them develop their skills and move into a job,

- 52% wanted the chance to volunteer, and saw this as a positive way to contribute in their community, as well as learn new skills
- 57% wanted the opportunity of a 'work taster' – unpaid job experience as a stepping stone towards employment
- 67% said a traineeship with Novas Scarman, with a recognised qualification.

One of the biggest factors in their offending was having nowhere safe to live - 70% said they had no accommodation of their own to go to, on release from prison.

Other significant factors were drug and alcohol problems, boredom, lack of a job, family breakdown, or a lack of family support.

Lisa's story

"I was a heroin and crack user who was always in and out of prison.

Moving to a Novas Scarman hostel helped me to stop using, stop offending and concentrate on what I wanted to do with my life.

I made great progress and was referred to the Novas Scarman Employment Works programme. I really wanted to help people whose shoes I once walked in.

I got given the chance to prove myself, and started a traineeship in one of Novas Scarman's housing support projects. At times it was hard, and I wanted to give up. But the team were so encouraging and supportive.

They made me feel very welcome and trusted me. Because of my past, trust was something I had not been given before.

I am now in full time employment as a Support & Development Worker within the Novas Scarman Group, and I feel very proud to be here.

I have been clean of both substances for 3 years, and with support, have moved on to my own accommodation. I now have a baby on the way too."

The Novas Scarman Employment Works (NEW) scheme is an award-winning programme, which offers individuals a paid traineeship and accredited training, with the chance to progress into a permanent job.

66% of men and women who started the NEW programme, have gained employment, either with Novas Scarman or with other organisations in the sector.

88% have not been convicted of any further offences since starting the programme.



Releasing the Potential of Young People

The nXt Generation is a social enterprise developed and run by two young women.

Nicole and Reaghelle were determined to demonstrate to other young people that they have a future, and can solve their own problems. They wanted to contact young people at risk of offending, who other agencies were failing to reach.

They came to Novas Scarman with an idea of how to offer guidance and support. Supported by our Development Worker, their funding application was approved by the Big Boost panel of young people, being administered by the organisation.

*'We aim to occupy the time and minds of other young people of our generation'.
(Reaghelle)*

The support from our Development Worker was designed to work with, and not 'do for'. Reaghelle and Nicole found this allowed them to develop their own product and identity. We offered encouragement and guidance, assisted them to contact other agencies, and provided advice on business opportunities. Through this, they developed a partnership with Connaught construction, to offer modern apprenticeships to young people.

The nXt Generation is now working with young people from age 11 to their early twenties. The focus is on building self-confidence and self-esteem, challenging negativity and setting personal ambitions. Key to their success, is that they are directly involved, using activities such as football coaching and off road cycling, as a means of breaking down communication barriers, building team work, and self belief.

Drawing on the experiences of young people, nXt Generation recently presented evidence to the Commission on Street Weapons. Working mainly in Manchester, nXt Generation are now building relationships in Liverpool.

'We have created a brighter future for our next generation' (Nicolle)

Reaghelle and Nicole can be contacted at txg@hotmail.co.uk

Social and Financial Impact

The annual cost to the taxpayer of keeping just one individual in custody for a year is £37,500. The wider cost - to families and wider communities - is estimated at £50,000.

We provide a holistic package of personalised support, addressing housing, health, and related needs. This provides a foundation for individuals to take steps into volunteering, training, employment, or to develop social enterprise.

Our approach is to build on people's strengths and release potential. Working in communities, we support grass roots initiative and creativity.

Through our Contemporary Urban Centres, we are creating an arts, cultural and enterprise hub. This exciting new model creates an employment infrastructure for marginalised communities, which is people and community-centred.

Focussing on preventative approaches that work brings significant social and financial returns for individuals and whole communities, and demonstrates real savings to the public purse.

As an example, the cost of supporting 10 people through our traineeship scheme is just £7500 pa, with a success rate of 66% going on to gain employment and 88% not re-offending.

Recommendations

We challenge the government to invest less in institutional provision that wastes lives and money, and more into successful community based preventative schemes run by the Third Sector:

- Developing innovative schemes that support people into employment, run in partnership with employers, to address skills gaps
- Social enterprise development, supported by Novas Scarman's Can Do programmes – ranging from coaching skills, and action learning networks, to practical business support
- Holistic personalised support – addressing housing, health and immediate needs, and enabling individuals to re-build family connections, and positive social networks in their communities
- Preventative work with young people, building confidence, hope, and strengthening communities
- Mentoring and coaching programmes should be extended to add further value, with opportunities for offenders to contribute



Novas Scarman services and contact points

The Novas Scarman Group is a major social justice charity at the cutting edge of tackling social disadvantage through social enterprise, innovation and positive impact.

Our work to reduce re-offending, includes:

- Outreach, housing and floating support services, for high risk offenders (subject to MAPPA), individuals with mental health support needs and drug and alcohol problems, for over 600 people each year, with average re-conviction rates of less than 10%
- Skills development programmes, learning and pathways into work, and social enterprise development creating work opportunities
- Partnership work to engage and strengthen communities such as work with gang cultures and community courts
- An Accommodation Gateway service, run in partnership with Bristol City Council to prevent homelessness and secure positive accommodation outcomes
- Initiatives and programmes to improve outcomes for women, BME communities and other groups who face particular disadvantage
- Accommodation based support services – providing a stepping-stone to independence
- Research including recent projects on the health needs of women who have been in prison, and the barriers faced by offenders seeking work.

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