

# **Back on Track**

## **Final Project Report**

### *BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT*

The Back on Track project was originally planned to meet a need that became apparent through the Employment Keyskills Programme (EKP), another project that Lincolnshire Action Trust runs in partnership with the National Probation Service in Lincolnshire. EKP provides employment advice and guidance, among other things, to adult offenders under Probation supervision in the community in Lincolnshire. Through discussions with clients on this project and with Probation staff, it became apparent that prisoners released from custody on licence to the Probation Service, had rarely undertaken any planning about their future employment prospects whilst in prison. This is despite two important and inter-linked observations; the period immediately after release from custody is when ex-prisoners are most likely to re-offend; and employment is the single most effective factor in preventing re-offending. Despite this, the feedback we were getting was that there was very little, if any, employment related activity occurring in local prisons. As a result, Lincolnshire Action Trust approached the Governors in each of the three prisons in Lincolnshire to see whether they would want to be involved in the pilot project. All three were very keen to be involved and were also able to provide information about the number of prisoners in their establishment, any employment related provision that was already happening, and how the pilot could link with this and other activities in each prison.

The application was written to ensure that any prisoner in any of the three prisons in Lincolnshire would be able to access adult guidance to enable them to formulate plans for learning and employment on release. We felt it was important that there were no eligibility criteria for access such as home area, length of sentence or offence type. This was partly to ensure equal access for all, but also to allow any research that was planned for the pilot projects to be able to identify any differences in levels of demand, success rates etc that may exist for different types of prisoner.

The original application included funding for one guidance practitioner and a part time administrator. We originally envisaged that one member of staff would be sufficient to meet the demand we thought would be present within the three prisons, although we later realised that we had underestimated the level of demand and therefore needed additional staff to meet this.

The methodology we proposed was that any prisoner could access adult guidance at any stage throughout their sentence in any of the three prisons. We planned to have an input into each induction of new prisoners to inform them about the service and how to access it. We also planned to inform prison staff, personal officers and other prison departments such as Education about the project to encourage referrals. Promotional materials were also placed around the prisons so they were visible to both prison staff and inmates. The delivery of the project needed to be flexible so that the pilot could respond to demand and so that it was accessible to as many prisoners with different needs as possible.

### *DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES*

Once the pilot funding had been agreed, we were able to recruit one of our existing guidance practitioners to the project, which meant there was no delay in the project starting. Following discussions with each of the prisons about practical aspects of commencing the project, Back on Track was fully operational from early January 2002. We recruited an administrator to the project who started in May. By July it became apparent that the demand for the project was exceeding staff capacity and therefore we applied to DfES for additional funding to allow us to recruit a second project officer. This was agreed, and enabled us to amend our delivery arrangements to make better use of staff time. We achieved this by arranging for the new Advice and Guidance Officer to see all new clients and then refer those who required guidance on to the guidance practitioner. The Advice and Guidance Officer then deals with all other clients. With the exception of this change to delivery, the project has continued in the same way throughout the pilot period.

The guidance practitioner holds the Certificate in Careers Guidance Parts 1 and 2 and the Advice and Guidance Officer has been working towards her NVQ 3 in Advice. The guidance practitioner also has significant knowledge about offender employment issues and the prison system, which has been a vital aspect of this project. The Advice and Guidance Officer was given a full induction into the Prison System and the particular needs of prisoners in relation to employment and training issues.

Staff were managed by the Trust Manager who had overall responsibility for the contract. This management included regular progress meetings, quality audits, contract compliance monitoring and staff appraisals.

The most significant change to what was planned was the project not becoming fully operational in HMP Morton Hall and HMP Lincoln. This was largely due to problems within the two prisons that were outside of our control. As a result of this, more delivery was undertaken at HMP North Sea Camp.

New prisoners were informed about the provision during their induction to the prison within the first week after arrival. The Advice and Guidance Officer attended each induction session to undertake a short presentation about Back on Track, what the provision offered, how it could assist prisoners and how they could access support. Publicity materials were also displayed around the prison, in areas where prisoners could easily access these. Prison staff, personal officers and other organisations working in the prison were also informed about the provision and agreements were made as to how this would link with other activities and how they could refer prisoners to the project.

Prisoners used the usual prison systems to gain access to the project, through the submission of an application, then an appointment being sent to them via their wing officer. This system allowed the project staff to allocate appointments in order to cope with demand. A drop-in system was not practical due to the confines of the prison environment. Prisoners were able to access the project at any stage during their time at the prison. Obviously the sooner an individual applied to see project staff, the more work we could undertake with them, and project staff encouraged individuals to access the provision at the earliest opportunity.

Each client who accessed the project was initially offered an individual needs assessment with the Advice and Guidance Officer. This appointment, which was usually an hour in duration, allowed the project staff to ascertain what the prisoner wanted from the project, the degree of support he/she required, what other activities they are involved in within the prison, and what the next stage would be. The first appointment will also allow the Advice and Guidance Officer to gain personal details about the prisoner and start to plan how the project is able to work with the client. An action plan

will be agreed with the individual, along with a date for the next appointment. Depending on the needs of the individual, they may be referred to the guidance practitioner for more in-depth support. The guidance practitioner then carried out a full guidance intervention to include ongoing exercises with the individual.

Due to the confines that prisoners experience whilst in custody, project staff contacted learning providers and employers on the individuals behalf to make initial contacts. Where possible, prisoners at HMP North Sea Camp, which is an open prison, were able to make visits to employers or local learning providers to attend interviews before release. This was encouraged as much as possible to allow individuals to practice their skills and improve their self-confidence.

Where possible, prisoners were also encouraged to utilise resources within the prison to further their learning goals. This could include undertaking basic skills courses with the Education Department, skills training within workshops, cognitive skills training with Probation staff etc.

The most important aspect of Back on Track was advice about disclosure of the individuals criminal record. The implications of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and the Criminal Records Bureau are integral when offenders are applying for employment, and therefore individuals require support to identify time periods for unspent convictions, to decide on methods of disclosure and to ascertain how their criminal record will affect their chosen learning or work route. Project staff worked closely with prison staff and probation staff to ensure accurate offence information is known, and also that probation officers who would be supervising the individual when released on licence, are supportive of the individuals plans for release. This liaison is vital to ensure the individual's plans do not conflict with any licence conditions and that they do not present risks of re-offending or harm.

Once the individual was approaching their estimated release date, project staff endeavoured to make links to community based provision in the individuals home area to continue the agreed action plan. All aspects of the work undertaken by Back on Track was then passed on to the supervising probation officer in the home area to ensure it could be followed up on release.

### *STRENGTHS/THINGS THAT WORKED WELL*

The way in which this project has been integrated into the prisons has been a real success, and has led to the success of the project overall. This has largely been due to project staff making significant efforts with prison staff to ensure the project was well known and valued at all levels. Regular liaison with key prison staff has also been vital to overcome problems encountered as a result of working in a prison environment. The project is regarded as being part of the prison, but because it is run by an independent provider, this has assisted with its credibility.

We would certainly advocate that any provider wanting to work in a prison environment seeks commitment from prison governors from the start. We approached governors before the application was written to discuss what the prison needed and to ensure our delivery plans were appropriate to each individual prison.

Motivation among prisoners was largely high and the project often had a back-log of referrals to deal with. We found that the majority of prisoners who accessed the project were very concerned about how their criminal record would impact on their future prospects and therefore sought advice and guidance about how best to overcome this. With the introduction of the Criminal Records Bureau, prisoners are becoming more aware that employers are able to seek information about the criminal record of potential employees. Support about how to deal with this to maximise employment opportunities is therefore in high demand among prisoners.

### *PARTNER INVOLVEMENT*

The lead partners in the project were the National Probation Service – Lincolnshire as contract holder, Lincolnshire Action Trust as delivery organisation and the three prisons as facilitators. All three partners worked together well, mainly as a result of respecting each other's expertise. A service level agreement was signed between Lincolnshire Action Trust and each of the three prisons, setting out expectations for both sides. Regular review meetings were held between relevant staff from partner organisations to ensure progression of the pilot and to resolve any difficulties experienced. The project encountered very few difficulties, which made partnership working very simple.

### *PILOT STAFF DEVELOPMENT*

Staff were involved in development activities as part of the Trust's overall commitment to training and development of all staff. As one of the staff members was new to the organisation, she underwent a comprehensive induction that included a familiarisation to the prison system and criminal justice system, relevant legislation such as the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, personal safety awareness etc. Following the induction period, ongoing training and refresher training was provided to ensure all staff are kept up to date with changing issues and circumstances. All aspects of this training and development were necessary to ensure staff members were able to operate effectively within the prison environment. One of our staff members was also enrolled on the NVQ3 in Advice, which she has almost completed.

### *ISSUES*

The most significant impact on the project was the delay in establishing the project in both HMP Lincoln and HMP Morton Hall. The reasons for this were different in each prison; at HMP Lincoln the project was reliant on referrals from the generic employment provision, which were low and then just as the project started to establish itself there, a serious riot occurred which meant we were unable to access the prison for several months. At HMP Morton Hall, internal disorganisation concerning resettlement activity resulted in several planning meetings taking place, but little

progress about implementation of the pilot. Due to these difficulties, the majority of activity has taken place at HMP North Sea Camp, which arguably has the highest level of demand for guidance due to the types of prisoner held there.

The main highlights of the project have been identifying and demonstrating a demand for this type of provision for serving prisoners and the progression of individual clients who have been supported to consider options that they previously hadn't thought of to improve their employment prospects and therefore improve their life chances.

The provision was also accredited with the Matrix standard during the pilot, only the second organisation in Lincolnshire to be awarded this.

#### *GOOD PRACTICE*

Guidance was not previously available in any of the prisons included in this project, as it is not in many other prisons across the country. This is despite prisoners generally being hard to engage and unlikely to access mainstream IAG support, but needing to be aware of how their criminal record impacts on their employment options, both for their own progression and to ensure public protection. Our experience of this client group is that they do not regard mainstream provision as 'for them' which leads to a detachment from such services. By engaging prisoners whilst they are in a familiar environment, and by highlighting the relevance of the provision to their individual needs (in relation to their criminal record), this provides commitment to an initial contact. Confidence in the provision can then be built up, and then the individual will be more comfortable with accessing mainstream support when released by building on their positive experience.

Research demonstrates that the period immediately after release from custody is when offenders are most likely to re-offend, and it is therefore important that prisoners are able to enter employment or training as soon after release as possible, rather than starting the guidance process on release. The pilot has demonstrated the value of investing funding in guidance 'in-reach' for prisoners and has had real benefits for some of the individuals who have participated on the project. In addition, the pilot has demonstrated the value of IAG for this client group to a range of individuals and agencies who would not previously have considered the relevance of this activity, which will hopefully bear fruit in the future.

#### *AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT.*

The area that we developed least was the links with home release areas. This was achieved for some prisoners, but not to the degree that we would have liked due to time constraints.

A further area for development is to mainstream this type of provision and make the activity sustainable. The pilot has demonstrated a need, but as yet there appears to be little commitment as to whose responsibility it is to fund this provision, which results in a piecemeal and short term activity being available.

#### *LESSONS*

The most valuable lesson we have learnt from the partnership activity is to respect each others expertise and recognise that this can be utilised to produce the best results, rather than each partner trying to do everything well.

One of the other lessons we have learnt is not to be surprised by the issues raised by prisoners. Staff who are experienced in working with this client group were still presented with issues and questions that they had never been asked before!

#### *OUTCOMES*

The outcomes for the project have been considerable for some of the clients who have accessed it and the three case studies attached demonstrate this. Further outcomes have included individuals improved self esteem and self confidence in their own abilities and their future prospects; a greater commitment to entering learning or work on release from custody, rather than the only option being reliance on state benefits; greater take-up of internal prison provision such as basic skills courses provided by the Education Department; and a greater inclusion in their feeling of belonging to society on release. It is impossible to comment on the reduction in re-offending that this project may have contributed to, due to the two year time-lapse of the reconviction data, however Back on Track has enabled prisoners to identify other options for their life when they are released.

#### *CONTRACTOR SUPPORT*

We have had a varying experience of the support provided. The support from Merlin Minds has been fantastic, despite our initial scepticism of the need for this type of role (we were pleased to be proved wrong!) Our contract manager has been very helpful with all aspects of the project including contract compliance, monitoring, dissemination and general support, as well as with wider issues such as developing links with the Home Office and the future role of our IAG Partnership in this type of activity.

IES have been very supportive of the project and mindful of the situation in which we have been working, which was essential. Jim Hillage was excellent with the interviews he conducted and very accommodating of the client group and their needs. Feedback from the prisoners who took part in this was also very complementary.

Our experience of MORI was less successful. The organisation of the interviews took a lot of effort as the various MORI staff who were involved seemed unable to understand the confines of working in a prison environment. A number of the prisoners who were interviewed by the researcher expressed their dissatisfaction at his attitude towards them and this type of activity. This was reported back to MORI and DfES.

The role of the researchers could have been more valuable if the research process had commenced sooner in the pilot. We felt it was somewhat hurried because of this.

#### *WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?*

This pilot has made an immense difference in a number of areas. Firstly, we hope that the results of the pilot project have put guidance for prisoners on the agenda for relevant agencies such as DfES, LSC and IAG Partnerships, and that a recognition is made that this client group are difficult, and expensive to work with, and don't always gain the expected outcomes in the available timescale. This client group has not previously featured as a priority for IAG provision, but arguably have a huge need for this type of support.

Secondly, it has enabled Lincolnshire Action Trust to demonstrate that quality IAG services can successfully be delivered by voluntary sector organisations, particularly for disadvantaged groups. This issue needs to be developed further if IAG is to benefit such groups, and funding sources will need to be mindful of this.

Finally, and most importantly, the pilot has made a huge difference to the lives of some of the individuals who have accessed the project. The attached case studies demonstrate how important this support can be to changing the lives of prisoners and how much value it can have to all involved. We would like to thank DfES for giving us the opportunity to make this difference.

Alison Goddard  
23<sup>rd</sup> April 2003

## OUTCOMES

**Total number of clients seen during the project: 409**

	<b>REFERRALS TO EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>REFERRALS TO LEARNING</b>
<b>CLIENT OUTCOMES</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>OUTCOMES AS % OF TOTAL CLIENTS SEEN</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>50%</b>

## **BACK ON TRACK**

Client Group: - Prisoner

The Client: David

David had entered custody at the age of 15, after living in a number of Social Services care homes. As a result of his early life, his education was erratic and he had not worked towards or gained any qualifications. He cannot remember ever wishing to pursue a career or job in any area or even considering his future.

David had served over 20 years in prison and was referred by the Prison Probation Officer as part of his resettlement plan, 6 months before he was released.

The Adviser: Christina

Christina has over ten years experience of providing guidance within the criminal justice system to ex-offenders and prisoners. She gained her guidance training from Nottingham Trent University and holds the Certificate in Careers Guidance Part 1 & 2.

The Guidance Process:

David was seen four times with the initial two sessions taking up to two hours each.

The initial session focussed on why career planning is useful; what benefits David would get from the process and discussing how we would proceed through the process. A substantial part of this session was to negotiate David's role in the process, as he believed that the process would be done with little participation from him. This is often a characteristic of long term prisoners that needs addressing. The following session focused on identifying potential and actual barriers to career choices as well as exploration of personal skills and interests. Various methods were used to do this, including exercises where skills analysis was used.

Describe Outcomes:

Throughout the process David became more confident and positive about his future. Areas of employment interest were identified, and consideration was given to the local job market of the area he was relocating to. Referral to training was made to gain a job specific qualification, which was identified both as a shortage in his place of residence, and as an area of interest. He was also linked with a company in this area to pursue employment opportunities once he had completed his training course.

Making the Case:

By the end of the guidance intervention, David had recognised that he had a place in the labour market and therefore a place in his local community when he was released. He also identified skills that would enhance his employment opportunities and potentially overcome some of the barriers identified.

## Client Group: - Prisoner

### The Client: Craig

Craig was a first time offender serving a four year sentence. He had an excellent employment history and had previously set up a successful business. He is the father of two children, but since his conviction has separated from his partner. Craig sought guidance, as he believed that it would be unlikely he would gain employment on release and the work he might be able to gain would be unskilled, low paid and possible on a casual contract.

### The Advisor: Christina

Christina has over ten years experience of providing guidance within the criminal justice system to ex-offenders and prisoners. She gained her guidance training from Nottingham Trent University and holds the Certificate in Careers Guidance Part 1 & 2.

### The Guidance Process:

A guidance practitioner saw Craig over several sessions. The focus of the guidance was to re-establish Craig's confidence and belief in the skills he has to offer a prospective employer. The guidance practitioner also gave assistance and guidance about disclosure of his criminal record. This work was done by skills analysis exercises, using labour market information to help him to see potential employment opportunities. An interview was also arranged with a local employer who offered Craig a position within the company. Support work was done with the employer and his workforce in respect of accepting Craig, and covering any issues they would have with an offender working alongside them.

### Key Issues:

The key issue that he identified was the lack of confidence that employers would employ him in a meaningful job role within his area of expertise. Further to placement of Craig with the employer, follow up work was done with Craig and the employer to sustain the employment.

## Client Group: - Prisoner

### The Client: Adrian

Adrian is a prisoner serving a six year sentence. Prior to being sentenced, he had been a Prison Officer for over 15 years. His family had re-located due to the publicity of the offence and his conviction. As a result of this, he had no knowledge of the area he was to be released to. Adrian sought guidance as he required a career change due to his offence, and was unsure what he could re-train to do.

### The Advisor: Christina

Christina has over ten years experience of providing guidance within the criminal justice system to ex-offenders and prisoners. She gained her guidance training from Nottingham Trent University and holds the Certificate in Careers Guidance Part 1 & 2.

### Guidance Process:

Adrian was seen over several sessions and initially he was very anxious about his future and felt unable to identify a way forward. He worked closely with the guidance practitioner to identify his transferable skills, area of interest and possible opportunities. Through this process Adrian gained confidence and began to adopt a positive attitude to his future.

### Key Issues:

Adrian's key issue was his impending career change and being able to identify his transferable skills from his previous employment. Also he was very anxious about future employer's reaction to him, as his offence was a breach of trust for his previous employer.

### Outcome:

After completing the main part of the guidance process, Adrian's interest in quality control was identified, along with an interest in the food/catering industry. Approaches were made to local companies and research was done with various employers. Eventually, through the contacts made at a previous Employer Conference, an employer was identified with an appropriate opportunity for Adrian. A training course was designed and implemented to train Adrian as a Quality Assurance Supervisor. Negotiations were made with the prison to ensure access to the training. Adrian has nearly completed his training and will then enter full-time employment with the company. This employment will continue after Adrian is released from custody.

### Making the Case:

Adrian has re-trained and gained employment, which is sustainable upon his release. Therefore his family will be able to come off benefits, which will also mean that Adrian's partner is going to return to college and also re-train in order to secure a new career for herself.