

***Former prisoners should be helped to find opportunities to volunteer, take part in peer mentoring, or provide information, advice and guidance, as the St Giles Trust provides. Such non-paid roles not only prepare the person for employment, they have an inherent value to reintegrating people into their communities and giving them a chance to make amends."***

**The Prison Reform Trust (Out for Good, 2012)**

## **Peer-led support through the Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF)**

The overall aim of this project is to provide released offenders with support to achieve their goal of desisting from re-offending through a model of professional peer-led support.

Released offenders face many barriers to maintaining a crime free lifestyle and the added support they receive from a peer who can act as role model as well as agent of practical change around issues such as housing, benefits etc will contribute to a reduction in re-offending rates. The project also contributes to an improvement in the quality and stability of family life as the coaching provided to family and friends will give them the confidence to identify potential signals that someone is at risk of re-offending and thus provide more effective support.

### **1) Objectives and planned outcomes**

The project aimed to provide coaching and accredited learning for 70 adult learners, enabling them to provide effective support to offenders released from prison and encouragement to lead positive and crime-free lifestyles. The adults engaged had been involved in the criminal justice system either as offenders themselves or family members or friends of offenders a group who are widely viewed as "the best therapists" in supporting offenders to desist from re-offending.

#### **Objectives:**

- Up-skill ex-offenders to provide effective practical support to released offenders

- Strengthen released offender's social support networks
- Provide coaching and support to enable some learners to complete their City & Guilds L3 in Advice & Guidance (Sep to Dec 2013)
- Provide a structured programme of unaccredited professional development including training in housing and benefits issues.
- Develop short training programme for family and/or friends of offenders wishing to provide peer support (August to January 2013)
- Delivering support and training to friends and families of ex-offenders including

## **2) What difference did the project make:**

### **For learners:**

We set out to provide coaching and accredited learning to 70 adults to enable them to provide effective support to offenders either in a Peer Adviser role or supporting a family member or friend.

### **What we actually achieved**

- 61 learners attended accredited and non accredited training/workshops
- 15 gained employment
- 24 families and friends engaged in bite sized learning activities one to ones and coffee mornings
- 15 gained employment
- 37 learners reported gaining new job related skills and feeling more motivated and confident about seeking employment
- 20 Families and Friends learners reported more confidence in providing support to ex-offender family members and friends.
- An average of 5 support interventions were carried out by learners with ex-offenders they supported

### **In communities:**

A key ethos within the Trust is to place ex-offenders at the heart of our services and currently 36% of paid staff are ex-offenders. 37 Learners gained an accredited L3 qualification in custody and many are now delivering our services in the community supporting offenders on release with housing and employment. We delivered services providing practical support to sustain offender's families in the community including use of peers with younger offenders. This proposal has arisen from our experience in delivering these services and feedback from staff including ex-offenders as to how we

can improve the means by which desistance from crime within the community can be achieved.

There was wider community involvement through our partnership working that was particularly helpful in us overcoming the challenges around engaging Families and Friends learners. Other involvement was via VCS organisations providing placements and St Giles Trust teams such as our WIRE (women's Through the Gates service) and the family support CAFÉ project working with families of ex-offenders in the boroughs of Southwark and Tower Hamlets.

### **On other stakeholders:**

Other groups and individuals that were positively effected by the Project were some of St Giles other in house Projects including the SOS team who deliver support to youngsters involved in gang related crime as well as our WIRE project. We also made a big impact on Highdown Prison Visitors Centre and the families and friends that attend the centre being able to offer them support. A difference was also made at the Prisoners Friends and Families Services as we were able to step in and run coffee mornings for them to offer support to their friends and families after funding for their own such service was ended.

### **A short Summary of the Project Timetable from project initiation, through to delivery, final review and celebration:**

- Week one reading Project Handbook/Project Application Report, looking at NIACE website at useful Resources etc
- Week two Initial Planning meeting, choose dates and venues for Community Learning activities
- Week three write, design, produce and distribute marketing materials
- Week four Research potential places to find learners for the project
- Week five visit organisations etc to meet potential partners and distribute/display leaflets. Give presentations to stakeholders to let them know what the project is and how the project can benefit learners
- Week six start to deliver Community Learning activities and sessions to learners
- Project is in flow and from here just needs to be maintained making sure impact evidence is collected along the way so we can measure the Impact the Project is having on learners. At the beginning of the Project and also whilst the project was running we were asking and assessing

what the needs of the learners were so we could deliver what was relevant and significant for them.

**Top tips for anyone wishing to replicate your project – based on the lessons learned from your own experience:**

- Give priority to who, how and when you, or others are going to collect impact evidence at the very start of the Project
- Focus on building up networking and referral routes so we can meet learners needs and aspirations
- Be flexible throughout the Project, what you plan to do on the Project and what you may find are the emerging needs of the learners can change along the way
- Give adequate time to Marketing your Project and don't expect results immediately, with the right actions and amount of effort results will come, be patient
- Keep a good balance between, marketing your Project, carrying out Admin, building up Partnerships, planning, preparing and delivering trainings/classes/activities etc and giving quality time to offer great customer service to learners
- Keep evaluating and reviewing your project and what actions you're taking and what results you are getting from those actions and adapt and implement new ideas.
- Group support and 1-2-1's
- Learners feedback and evaluation is the key to success, be ready for change, being adaptable
- Staff with a wide range of life experiences, flair and skills, flexible to changes to meet the learners and projects aspirations.
- Lastly and most importantly, ENJOY being on the journey with your learners