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Developing employability skills effectively: HMP Kirklevington

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Brief description

Highly effective development of employability and personal skills for offenders, to promote independence and aid resettlement and integration into the community on release.

Overview – the prison’s message

‘We take our responsibility to prepare prisoners for release and resettlement into the community very seriously. It is difficult to help prisoners develop the personal skills to become independent and take responsibility for their future after leaving the prison when they have been used to the strict prison regime for long periods of time.

Helping prisoners develop their potential whatever that may be, challenging and supporting them, encouraging them to look towards what they will need to do to integrate into the community, to focus on what type of employment they want and how this can be achieved - are among our key challenges.’

Sheena Maberley, Head of Learning, Skills and Employment

The good practice in detail

It is difficult for offenders leaving prison to secure employment and many slip back into a life of crime. Many offenders don’t have the everyday work skills that most of us take for granted. Employers require their staff to have a good work ethic and be of benefit to their business. Providing offenders with opportunities to develop good work and personal skills while in prison is the key to giving them the best chance of gaining employment on release.

‘We have become very good at identifying different organisations that can provide funding for our prisoners to access a range of different courses, both whilst at the prison and after release.’

So how does HMP Kirklevington help offenders develop skills that will have a real benefit in helping them resettle into the community and increase their employment and training opportunities?

A significant part of the induction that prisoners receive upon arrival at the prison is focused on the opportunities that are available to develop skills that will improve their opportunities for employment or training on release. The focus is on encouraging prisoners to start to take responsibility for their future development, becoming progressively more independent, and looking towards what they will do after release. All the key people linked to education, training and employment have an input into the initial induction and they all deliver the same message: 'How do we help you to develop the skills you need to gain employment on release?'

'It's important that from arrival at the prison a prisoner starts to focus on life after release. Our role is resettlement. The first question I ask on meeting a prisoner is: 'What job are you going to do when you leave?' Gabrielle Lee, Governor

Alison MacRory from the A4E Careers Information Advice Service and based at the prison says: 'Prisoners have very complex individual needs and many have barriers to gaining employment or further training. Individual interviews are the key to exploring what is needed to move forward and achieve a prisoner's goal. Sometimes, it is about being realistic with a prisoner about what can be achieved. We focus on the type of work or training they want to do after release. We don't limit our thinking to just what is available in the prison.'

The prison has a clear understanding of its resettlement function and the importance of ensuring that all departments in the prison play their part in helping the prison meet its objectives. From the start of a prisoner's time, the focus is on progressing to be able to work or train outside the prison when eligible for release on temporary licence. For this approach to work successfully, learning and skills staff work closely with all other departments within the prison.

'Gaining employment or training on release is a clear focus for many of our prisoners', says Caroline Kitching, Head of Offender Management. 'High numbers of our prisoners have employment advocacy as part of their sentence plan. The offender management team works very closely with the careers information advice service and learning and skills to develop a sentence plan with a clear focus on gaining employment. We use the specialist knowledge from careers advice, particularly, on skill shortages in the areas where prisoners are to be released to tailor sentence plans very specifically to individual needs. Plans are detailed with very specific targets.'

By working towards utilising release on temporary licence to gain employment or progress into training, offenders are not limited to what's available in the prison. There is an expectation that prisoners will work while at the prison. In most cases, what the offender does in the prison will benefit them in the future. If, for example, a prisoner wants to progress to a college course, staff ensure that their work in the prison is flexible enough to develop the course-related skills they need in the education department. If a prisoner is placed in a workshop, it will be linked to the type of employment he wants to secure. 'We have become very good at identifying different organisations that can provide funding for our prisoners to

...it is important that prisoners become independent in their thinking, finding solutions to the task in hand.

access a range of different courses, both whilst at the prison and after release', says Alison MacRory.

Mike Searle, the OLASS Manager from Manchester College says: 'The education department is flexible in the way it delivers its courses. We recognise the importance of prisoners having the opportunity to gain real work experiences and we work with the prison to tailor our courses to meet individual needs. Many of our courses are offered in the evening after prisoners have returned from work. It is important to help prisoners see that lots of people balance employment and study to help them progress.'

Work within the prison

Prisoners in the workshop know that what is expected is the same as an employer would expect. Standards of behaviour and their attitude to work are very important. The workshop runs as a commercial operation and to current business standards. Prisoners are made aware of the types of employment they could expect from the skills they are developing. Prisoners work towards undertaking community payback work outside the prison that puts into practice the skills they have learnt. 'The focus is always about preparing prisoners for employment', says Peter Hall, an instructional officer. 'There's no point in developing skills that won't help prisoners become employed. Many of the skills they learn here are easily transferred to other employment within service industries.'

The opportunity to work on community projects in a work situation is seen as good preparation in developing the work skills needed for paid employment.

Work in the welding workshop is usually based around projects that benefit the community. Prisoners are involved with work outside the prison to install what has been produced in the workshop. They take great pride in producing work to a high standard and can see the way this benefits the community. Good links with local colleges provide prisoners with opportunities to progress to higher level qualifications by attending college whilst on release on temporary licence.

Work within the prison is varied. Land-based activities at Kirklevington Grange provide good opportunities for prisoners to develop a range of skills. The qualifications on offer to prisoners in this type of work have credibility in the industries in which they would seek employment. 'The skills developed by prisoners on the estate are very effectively utilised by our 'task force' which works on a range of projects to benefit the community', says Russ Bates who works in land-based activities at the prison.

...without the reality of real work situations where prisoners can develop the coping skills they need, rarely will this be an experience which will make a real difference to reducing re-offending in the future for the individual concerned.

Work in the community

Prisoners are required to undertake 30 days unpaid community work before they are able to seek paid employment working on release on temporary licence. Training and employment officers manage the process and engage with the community to identify suitable projects that can be linked to the skills that are being developed in the prison. The opportunity to work on community projects in a work situation is good

preparation in developing the skills needed for paid employment.

Prior to a prisoner starting community work, a 'preparation for work' course is completed. The course is accredited and focuses on what is required in terms of conduct and behaviour. It aims to help prisoners develop independence and a sense of responsibility, and to match the right skills to the work so the experience is of maximum benefit to the prisoners. 'We work closely with the sentence plan to make sure the right type of work is chosen', says Simon Russell, a training and employment officer

The personal development of prisoners is recognised and recorded to ensure that prisoners can see the progress they have made with their personal skills development. 'Developing a good work ethic is a key factor in whether a prisoner will be successful in gaining paid employment', says Steve Robert, a training and employment officer. 'The aim is that the community work that prisoners do will be a real experience of work. It is when prisoners start to develop the work ethic that employers want.'

One of the prisoners says: 'I have been able to use the skills I have learnt at the prison in the community work I have done. My confidence grew when I realised that I could work at a standard that was the same as other employees. The prison has helped me realise that I am capable of doing a good job in the workplace. I am now looking forward to successfully using my new skills when I am released.'

The prison has helped me realise that I am capable of doing a good job in the workplace.

Finding employment on release from prison

The 'job club' is an important part of the prison. Staff guide prisoners to the employment vacancies, but don't complete job applications for them. Prisoners are encouraged to be independent and to think for themselves about how they will apply for a job. 'We can provide all sorts of help with developing CVs, telephone technique and how to deal with disclosure but the motivation to get the job must come from them', says John Dauncey, the Employment Liaison Officer.

Prison background

Kirklevington Grange is one of three male resettlement prisons in England. Its role is to prepare men, who have often spent long periods in prison, for release. The prison is located near Yarm in North Yorkshire and it has an operational capacity of 283. All prisoners stay in the prison for at least six months and are involved in education, training or work in or outside the prison. The prison works with a range of partner organisations including Jobcentre Plus, employers, training providers, colleges and community organisations.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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