

# PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

## GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

### A CASE STUDIES SERIES



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The views expressed in these case studies are those of the respective organisations and the publication of the case studies should not be viewed as an endorsement of these organisations and their work by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. The data and statistics presented within the case studies have been locally collected and cannot be verified by the Home Office, Clinks and Social Firms UK.

## Background

Low qualifications and lack of employment are recognised within the Government's strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation* as key social issues related to re-offending.\*

Some local areas have already developed social enterprises as one way to overcome barriers around the employability of ex-offenders. However at the time of writing there is currently very little that brings together learning or examples of effective practice to assist others in doing this.

Recognising this gap, the Home Office commissioned a short term programme of work undertaken in February and March 2013 by Clinks and Social Firms UK.

The programme set out to explore and assess the role of social enterprises in enabling both adult and young offenders to access training and employment opportunities. The results provide a body of work that will significantly contribute to cross-Government thinking about how to embed and support social enterprises working with offenders. The programme included two elements:

- The development and publication of this series of twenty Case Studies. The social enterprises featured in the case study series were invited, following a competitive application process, to write about their own experiences and insights into the opportunities and barriers confronting their development and sustainability.
- A Summary Report which brings together the key learning about developing and sustaining social enterprises offering employment and employability training to offenders.

Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

These resources also complement previous work undertaken in partnership between Clinks and the Home Office aimed at increasing the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector's involvement in local IOM arrangements.

\* Ministry of Justice. May 2013. *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*: [www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation](http://www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation)

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# Co-operating Out Of Crime

Dave Nicholson

Ex-Cell Solutions Ltd



*The Role of Co-operatives in Providing  
Training and Employment Opportunities for  
Offenders*

## A Case Study of Wages UK



Dog Grooming



Card Making

## Introduction

This case study presents Ex-Cell Solution's experience of developing a co-operative form of social enterprise to assist women offenders in prison and those serving community sentences to become self-employed and to develop their own social enterprises in a supportive environment. It specifically explores how a multi-stakeholder co-operative model makes an effective business and delivery vehicle for self-employment training, social enterprise development and resettlement support. We show how mutual business and resettlement support can make offender-owned businesses sustainable and at the same time reduce re-offending. We also tell some of their success stories to demonstrate how transferable their experience might be. The case study concludes that the promotion, support and development of specifically co-operative forms of social enterprise would further promote sustainable employment and rehabilitation for offenders.

## Background

Ex-Cell Solutions is an ex-offender-led worker co-operative that works with offenders, ex-offenders, prisons, probation trusts and the co-operative and mutual sector to develop co-operative and mutual social enterprises providing employment and training opportunities for women and men offenders.

The focus of the case study is WAGES-UK (Women's Action to Gain Economic Security), a multi-stakeholder co-operative providing self-employment and social enterprise training and employment opportunities for women offenders and ex-offenders. It also includes mutual business and resettlement support to make the businesses created by the women sustainable and to prevent them from future offending.

WAGES was developed in the context of the 80% of women prisoners who go straight into unemployment on their release and because offenders in general form part of the core jobless group that 60% of employers deliberately exclude. Getting a job is associated with reducing re-offending, yet ex-offenders face significant barriers to employment. Self-employment provides an alternative whilst also providing flexibility for women to fit work around their other responsibilities like childcare.

The model for WAGES was based firstly on the experiences of Social Co-operatives in the Italian criminal justice system, which deliver resettlement and rehabilitation services providing a real paid job in co-operatives, co-owned and controlled by offenders, ex-offenders and criminal justice and resettlement agencies. Secondly the model builds on the experience of the WAGES Women's Cooperative development programme in the United States ([www.wagescooperatives.org](http://www.wagescooperatives.org)).

WAGES-UK started in 2009 with a resettlement project run by Ex-Cell Solutions working with women being released from HMP Styal to Greater Manchester, focusing on overcoming their barriers to employment. We learned from this project that self-employment was often a more appropriate option for women because of the flexibility it allowed to fit their employment around caring responsibilities and other resettlement issues. But the problem was the women lacked confidence and experience and needed support to make the jump into working for themselves as a viable and sustainable option. Ex-Cell Solutions devised a self-employment training and support programme to be delivered in the prison. This was followed by a business and resettlement support on release, based on the principle of working for yourself, not by yourself. The programme was piloted during 2012 and WAGES-UK was set up as the business and resettlement support vehicle in 2013.

## Our experience: WAGES-UK

The WAGES programme starts with the training programme which raises enterprise awareness and supports women offenders to be more enterprising. Participants explore the option of self-employment and ultimately set up businesses as a means of helping them maintain a crime-free lifestyle. We support women in prison pre- and post-release to achieve this as well as women serving community sentences and those on licence. The programme contains ten one-day workshops, usually with twelve women on each programme. The workshops are built around co-operative learning principles placing each woman in the role of expert and enquirer. We create enterprise learning circles where participants share their knowledge and ideas with each other. This provides space for exploring ideas, not just information giving, and creates a framework for mutual learning and support. It helps the participants to gain a sense of ownership and responsibility, learning how to solve problems rather than being given solutions.

The programme includes contributions from experts who are currently running businesses. This brings a new energy and perspective to the group and acts as a catalyst to further discussions. In addition, all those running the programme are running businesses themselves which adds value to the learning inside and outside the prison.

At the end of the programme the women present their ideas to key stakeholders such as prison staff. This helps embed their learning and test it on people who have not been involved with the programme. The participants then meet a support worker to develop a support and action plan for when they are released, to help turn their business plans into reality. Post programme they also have the opportunity of joining the WAGES-UK Co-operative which acts as a mutual business and resettlement network providing on-going post-programme support.

The WAGES Co-operative takes over from where the training programme leaves off. Membership of the co-operative is comprised of two groups – women who have completed the training programme who want to become self-employed or set up a social enterprise within the WAGES family and the women's business support and resettlement agencies. Ownership and control of the co-operative is on the basis of one person/organisation one vote. This structure means that business and resettlement support are not services delivered by the experts and passively received by the service users. They are co-produced by both parties in the same way as the learning was co-produced in the WAGES training programme. Co-ownership enables co-production.

We provide further, sector-specific, business training and assistance with getting work, through negotiating contracts on behalf of members providing back office support and joint marketing initiatives including inter-trading amongst members. Currently sector-specific support is available in the fashion and design sectors and in catering and craft food production. We have plans for film, photography and arts sector support. Generic support and advice is also available for women becoming self-employed or setting up social enterprises in other sectors.

There are currently nine women who are members of the social enterprise and three business and resettlement support agency members. None of the women have re-offended and the members (women and support agencies) have succeeded in supporting each other's businesses as well as their resettlement and preventing them from re-offending. The co-operative effectively operates as an enterprise and resettlement circle.

For those who decide that self-employment is not for them after all, the co-operative provides a job brokering service. The resettlement element of the support is again co-produced with all members helping each other particularly through the use of social media networks.

The following are examples of some of the businesses that have been set up by women who have been on the WAGES programme:

## Embellish Handmade Card Designs

SC is now running her own workshop at The Pinehurst Centre in Liverpool. Aimed at people who are residents at Pinehurst, the art classes are an alternative to being on the streets with nothing to do. SC has recently applied for a grant to buy materials to continue her classes. Alongside this work, she continues to make the most delicate and beautiful hand crafted cards and hopes to get a commercial contract to sell them. She has previously served over forty custodial sentences and this is the longest she has been out of prison in twenty-five years. Her art focused workshops help support other offenders on community sentences to engage in the classes rather than committing petty crime.

## Pampered Pooches Dog Grooming

SR is now running a dog grooming business from her home. After receiving training and a small amount of funding from WAGES-UK to buy equipment and to advertise, she has diversified into dog sitting alongside grooming. Visit [Pampered Pooches on Facebook](#).

## Double Sparkle Biohazard Cleaners

LL is currently developing her own cleaning company which will specialise in biohazards.

## Marj's Jewels Jewellery Making

MH makes and sells her jewellery to local people and on markets. She is currently working part time and continues to develop the business further.

## Ex-offender hostel

KH, who was released from HMP Askham Grange in August 2012, is planning to use her home and the land surrounding it, to set up an ex-offender hostel, where offenders can be released on licence, gradually being introduced back into the community. KH will also be offering onsite training and work placements through her membership of WAGES-UK.

## Key learning

Findings from an evaluation of the pilot programme in HMP Styal showed that from a prisoner perspective there is a need for programmes like this. The programme was seen as being intellectually challenging, providing a more engaging way of learning than other courses. It increased participants' confidence and the provision of ongoing support post-release was seen as critical in reducing re-offending and helping develop the women's enterprise aspirations:

*"We have something positive to do and someone to help us focus on that."*

From the prison's perspective, the programme had unexpected rehabilitative spin-offs, for example: building a sense of family and working together; creating an increased sense of wellbeing; and positive attitudes and activities. The evaluation suggested that this co-operative enterprise approach to women's resettlement is not currently provided elsewhere and that the prison wanted the pilot to be replicated.

From Ex-Cell's perspective, there were some important learning points from using this particular model. A multi-stakeholder co-operative structure provides an effective social enterprise for women offenders to create their own employment and desist from crime through mutual aid. It provides a means of overcoming obstacles to helping offenders into employment, particularly the lack of mainstream job opportunities and, in the case of women, helps provide flexible approaches that enable them to fit employment around their caring responsibilities and other resettlement issues.

The model provides a case study of how offenders can be supported to develop and manage their own social enterprise and we believe that it is transferable to other contexts. It demonstrates how co-operative learning, working and mutual support can build confidence to sustain major positive lifestyle changes. We found that while developing human capital (offenders' skills and capacities) is important, enhancing social capital (relationships and networks) is vital in securing access to sustainable employment and reducing re-offending.

The promotion, support and development of specifically co-operative forms of social enterprise would therefore further promote sustainable employment and rehabilitation for offenders.

