

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2021-10-YO20	Inside Connections CIC
Visit Date	Visited By
9 th February 2022	Victoria Southwell (Zoom call)
Overall aim of the funding	
<p>To provide a unique package of support to a minimum of 60 young people (30 per year) through a 'youth hub' that will deliver a range of activities. The Hub Coordinator will engage with employers to create pathways into work and promote collaborative multi-agency working to enable a coordinated approach to meet the needs of the young people.</p>	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Inside Connections CIC (IC) is a Community Interested Company that was set up in 2017. IC employs 7 members of staff and 2 consultants plus pays for external support with admin and digital marketing. Over half the staff team come from backgrounds similar to the people they work with. A board of 3 Directors (1 on the payroll, 1 paid as a consultant and 1 unpaid) support the staff team. The Directors meet quarterly and bring a mix of expertise in HR, business planning, prison education and growth and development. The Founder, John Burton, supports the Directors as a Special Advisor.</p> <p>IC has a Strategic Document which is essentially a statement of intent rather than a detailed Strategic Plan that outlines the key objectives for the future. The Directors are able to clearly articulate their plans for the future and there is a strategy in place but it isn't currently reflected in a formal document. Developing this is a key priority for the coming year.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>On the call I spoke with Marie Petts (Managing Director), Oliver Sumner (Executive Director) and Barbara McDonough (consultant and Director).</p> <p>Marie has been working with IC since 2018 and met John the founder when he was released on license in her local area. She was keen to support a CIC and when John told her about the work he had been doing she changed her career path and relocated to Liverpool to join the IC team. She doesn't draw a salary from IC but is a key member of the senior staff team. Marie has a vast amount of senior level experience in business planning and strategic development.</p> <p>Oliver joined IC five months ago and has a background in prison education, employer engagement and careers advice and guidance to offenders. He has worked for a number of large national charities who support work in this area and is extremely knowledgeable and well networked, especially with the local Young Offender Institutions. He manages the staff team on a day-to-day basis.</p> <p>Barbara also has a background in prison education and employment projects. She is well linked into new funding opportunities and developing collaborative approaches to working with larger partners to deliver employment outcomes as part of big funding bids. She has significant knowledge of the issues and a good network of stakeholders which she will leverage to support IC's continued growth.</p>	

Aims and Activities

IC's mission is to give people a fairer chance in life, to make positive change and reduce crime. They empower individuals to change their lives, impacting on individuals, families and communities. They aim to create sustainable employment for those that most need it by responding to employer needs and providing candidates with specialist skills.

IC does this through offering a number of core services; 1) training - providing fully funded training programmes that comply with the current labour market to increase the chances of a job outcome for learners; 2) recruitment – developing partnerships with employers across the UK to offer a flexible pathway into work; 3) care services – supporting young people who are accommodated away from their own homes or families; 4) prison support – providing through the gate services in a number of HMPs; and 5) mentoring – providing tailored mentoring plans for each learner on the IC programme.

Since 2018 IC has worked with 120 young people known to have criminal convictions and at least 60% have moved on to secure a positive destination and not reoffended due to employment or re-entering education or training.

Safeguarding

IC's approach to safeguarding has been professionalised in the past 12 months with the arrival of a new member of staff taking on a Head of Care role. They are the named person on the Safeguarding Policy and IC adopted a detailed formal policy. All staff are DBS checked and they complete safeguarding modules via an online HR platform at the start of their employment and annually to refresh their knowledge. The policy clearly sets out the Safeguarding procedures that need to be adhered to. Employers are also required to undergo safeguarding orientation and this is a key area that is explored as part of a risk assessment.

IC staff have raised safeguarding concerns about two young people they have worked with over the past 12 months.

Finances

Unaudited financial statements for the year ending 31st August 2021 show income of £334,768 against expenditure of £340,923 resulting in a small deficit of £6,154.

The balance sheet shows net current liabilities of £131,590 and an overall liability figure of £133,288. These are made up of an agreed overdraft and loan with their bank. IC was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show increases in income linked to IC's growth strategy. Currently secured income for 2022 equates to around 60% of expenditure with more funding decisions due in May (IC is confident that these will be successful). A surplus between income and expenditure in 2023 would see the liabilities significantly reduced and potentially cleared. Whilst there is a deficit for IC I do feel on reviewing their financial forecasting that it is likely that this will be reversed over the next few years and I am confident that the income growth that they are predicting is achievable. Covid has undoubtedly delayed some of the income growth that had been expected in the last financial year which will hopefully not be an issue going forward.

There are good financial systems in place. One of the Managing Director's oversees all finances and is supported by an external accountant. Meetings are held every two weeks with the Directors and Senior Managers to review cash flow and expenditure.

Current Situation and need

Young people have been amongst the hardest hit following the pandemic. 30% of 18-24 year olds were employed in the sectors most affected by lockdown with 1 in 7 young people now claiming unemployment benefits. Within Liverpool City Region 11% of 18-24 year olds are claiming unemployment benefits which is higher than the national average of just over 9%. This situation puts a young person with an offending history at a significant disadvantage in entering the job market, especially when 13% of offenders report never having had a job. Young black men are especially impacted by this situation.

IC works in a part of the North West that is identified as experiencing high crime and high youth unemployment according to the UK Crime and Youth Unemployment Map. With national reoffending rates within 12 months of being released from prison high, the challenge of reducing reoffences by young people in the area is significant. To help design a programme of support to help young offenders avoid a return to prison, IC ran a series of focus groups with prisoners and prison staff from one of the Youth Offending Institutions they work with. Multiple questions were asked which helped to identify a number of key areas in which young people felt they would need some additional support to avoid the risk of reoffending. These areas included; a lack of employment opportunities locally; disclosing to an employer a criminal record; training needs around interview preparation, money and budgeting and attitudes and behaviours; and support prioritising personal affairs within the first few weeks of release.

To address these issues IC has started supporting young offenders using a youth hub model which delivers a number of personal development focused interventions such as 1:1's, mentoring circles, skills development sessions and team building activities. A young person is paired with a youth mentor who identifies the key issues that need support and develops an action plan of activities that ultimately lead to a positive destination in terms of a job outcome. The employment ready aspects of support include various sector exposure sessions, work experience opportunities and "have a go" activities. Once the young person is ready for work, IC works with a number of national employers within a range of key sectors who all understand the needs of young offenders and are happy to recruit someone with a criminal conviction. IC then continues to support the young person whilst in work with any wrap around support they need and continues to monitor their progress. A digital app developed by IC also provides ongoing advice and information and is a key way of keeping in contact with the young person.

60 young people will be provided with support over the two-year period of the grant.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1

EKA 1

Improvement in life skills, employability and understanding of the world of work.

EKA 2

50% reduction in offending behaviour

EKA 3

80% of young people engaged with will achieve and education, employment or training outcome.

Request and Budget

IC is requesting **£60,000** over 2 years to work with 60 young people.

£30,000 in year 1 - £24,000 (Young Person's Coordinator salary) £2,000 (contribution to Head of Care salary), £1,800 (laptops), £1,000 (team building activities), £800 (marketing) and £400 (guest speaker and volunteer expenses).

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Conclusion

Inside Connections is a vibrant organisation that is founded on the strong desire of John Burton to ensure that young people in Liverpool don't make the same mistakes that he did and ruin their lives and the lives of their families due to criminality. John is without a doubt one of the key strengths of the organisation, despite not being a member of staff. He spends a lot of his time delivering talks and meeting key stakeholders but he really cuts through when interacting with young people. His approach isn't hugely complicated or academic but he is powerful in the way that he is very honest in explaining the reasons behind his involvement in crime. He was a very successful and significant criminal in Liverpool and uses his experiences to highlight the downsides of this way of life. He understands that for most young people their crimes are driven by the desire to earn lots of money. He also understands that the local environment is a key component in this. The young people IC work with come from areas of acute deprivation and poverty. Some are part of families where several generations have been out of work so there is no culture of formal employment. Crime is a given, crime rates are extremely high and breaking this mindset is a key enabling factor in bringing about a change.

IC staff are good at identifying young people who are furthest away from the labour market and work intensively with them to take them to a place where paid employment is not only viable but will be successful. John and the team are very clear that to draw these young people away from the attraction of crime, jobs need to be well paid, have some degree of status, a sense of community and progression routes. Therefore, the team work hard to link in with employers who are able to both offer these kinds of opportunities but who also understand the challenges that employing a young offender might bring. The success that they have had in this area to date demonstrates that they have clearly done well in getting this bit right.

I was very struck by how IC staff talked about their intervention. They spoke a lot about "stopping the escalation" and how everything they do is essentially to stop young people from entering adult prison.

The proposed project is building on strong foundations and IC has seen really strong success rates in helping the people who use their services. They do work with more than just young offenders though so some of the success rates aren't linked specifically to overcoming the barriers faced by people with criminal convictions. At the assessment we did discuss the need for this funding to solely be focused on those who had served a custodial sentence and not include those at risk of offending. It was clear from the discussion we went on to have that this was understood and this funding would be about stopping reoffending and further imprisonment.

This is an organisation with strong community links, lots of status locally and good links with employers. Over the past 12 months they have brought in several new members of staff with extensive knowledge and expertise who will play a key role in

helping IC to move forward and realise their ambitions. The pandemic has forced them to develop their community work as they were unable to access prisons for long periods of time. This has been hugely beneficial as it has meant that they have moved forward with the employment side of their work more quickly than they might have ordinarily and have refined their community support offer. A grant would help them to build on the success that they have had to date and provide a crucial service in Liverpool to young people at real risk of offending throughout their whole lifetime.

I have marked the risk linked to this application amber due the current financial picture of IC. However, I do not see this as being an area of too much concern as there is a clear growth plan to address this. This should be monitored during the grant period though.

A number of the applications have come from organisations that are founder led and whilst John doesn't formally work for IC he is an important and influential part of the work they do. The grass roots nature of the organisation and the wider approach to engaging with this group of young people will make this application an interesting one to fund. There is a lot that IC would contribute to the portfolio but also would gain a huge amount from being amongst other organisations working with young offenders. They would also benefit from consultancy support through Cranfield Trust. Therefore, I would recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating		
Risk = Medium	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High