

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2021-10-YO40	The Turnaround Project
Visit Date	Visited By
26 th January 2022	Victoria Southwell (Zoom call)
Overall aim of the funding	
<p>To provide move on support to young offenders enrolled on The Turnaround Project's transitional employment project. This will lead to them securing conventional employment with employers identified and supported by TTP who understand the needs of young people with offending histories. A new peer mentoring programme will also be developed to provide volunteer support for young people through their journey with TTP over a 15-month period.</p>	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>The Turnaround Project (TTP) is a Northern Irish Registered Charity that was set up in 2016 and registered in 2017. TTP employs nine members of staff plus also has 10 transitional staff who are ex-offenders working for their social enterprises. A board of 10 Trustees support the staff team and two Advisers also attend Trustee meetings from the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Probation Board for Northern Ireland. The Trustees meet every two months and bring a strong mix of expertise ranging from business enterprise, finance, learning and education and policy and strategy. Currently one Trustee has lived experience of the criminal justice system.</p> <p>A number of sub-committees meet; a Business and Finance group and New Futures Centre group as well as other time limited task-based groups looking at issues such as evaluation and lived experience.</p> <p>A detailed and engaging Strategic Plan is in place for 2020-23 setting out strategic goals for growth and also mapping out a clear vision and approach. The impact of Covid has affected some areas of work – particularly the development of the second social enterprise – however this is now making progress. The Trustee Board plays a key role in supporting and informing strategy development.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>On the call I spoke with Richard Good (Director), Tara O'Hara (Business Development Lead) and Rachel O'Brien (Trustee). Richard is also the founder of TTP.</p> <p>Richard has led TTP since it's conception in 2016. He has a background in policy work and spent many years in the Department of Justice, serving as a Special Adviser to the Minister of Justice from 2010-16. He values collaboration, both internally and externally, and believes in giving people the freedom to pursue their ideas whilst keeping a firm hand on the direction of travel and remaining true to the strategy. With the growth of TTP he is emerging into a new role with less line management responsibility and more oversight and 'intention' leadership.</p> <p>Tara has significant experience in business development and has overseen the financial planning and growth of TTP since it started.</p> <p>Rachel was Director of RSA's Transitions Project and has 30 years of experience working with charities, think tanks and government around prison policy.</p>	

Aims and Activities

TTP's vision is of an inclusive community where everyone has hope and opportunity. It aims to do this through achieving two goals; to help people serving sentences to turn around their futures and by engaging the wider community in supporting them on that journey.

Main activities undertaken are providing 12 months transitional employment to ex-offenders through two social enterprises – Outwork a gardening and ground maintenance company and Big Loop Bikes a big repair service. All the young people TTP work with come via referrals from Hydebank Prison and Hydebank College. Outwork supports those who are allowed to work in the community on day release whilst still in prison to work as trainees whilst those who are serving community sentences or who have already been released from prison work as transitional employees.

Alongside the social enterprises TTP also provides coaching/mentoring to participants to support them address barriers to leaving their offending pasts behind. TTP delivers a strength-based model of support that respects self determination and involves the production of a personal structured plan that addresses the social and economic factors that have been identified as important on a person's journey away from the criminal justice system. TTP believes in creating shared and supportive communities so have designed an approach that develops community capital by engaging those who have served sentences and others who have not in a shared, supportive community that engages in supporting its own members and others in wider society.

Over the course of the year TTP works with around 24 people with offending backgrounds who have served a custodial sentence.

Safeguarding

The Turnaround Project has a robust approach to safeguarding that was developed with support from NIACRO. All staff receive training through ACCESS (NI) and the Director is named as the Safeguarding Lead with the Chair of Trustees as a back-up. There is a good understanding of what makes a person vulnerable at TTP and strong links with relevant local agencies to raise and support any concerns. With the development of the new peer mentoring programme Safeguarding training is being reviewed to ensure that it is sufficient and this is being done with support from another charity, St Giles.

Finances

Unaudited financial statements for the year ending 31st March 2021 show income of £313,609 against expenditure of £213,804 resulting in a surplus of £99,805 for the year. £67,061 was unrestricted and £32,744 restricted. The balance sheet shows net current assets of £125,011 of which £116,569 is unrestricted. The reserves policy states that 6 months fixed operating expenses should be held which is still being worked towards.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show an increase in planned expenditure linked to TTP's growth strategy. Currently income for both 22/23 and 23/24 falls below expenditure but this is mainly due to revenue targets for the social enterprises being increased and existing contracts running out at the end of 2023. These contracts though are likely to be renewed for the 2023/24 financial year.

Good financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the Business Development Lead who is supported by the Treasurer. Book keeping and

payroll is undertaken by an external company who produce a dashboard as part of the management accounts that are presented at the bi-monthly Trustee Meetings.

Current Situation and need

Over 32% of the population of Northern Ireland identify as having had adverse childhood experiences. And with little alternative education provision for those who cannot cope in mainstream education and with the age of criminal responsibility set at 10 years, those suffering from trauma, learning difficulties and mental health issues are overrepresented within the youth justice system. They are at greater risk of paramilitary threat and intimidation and punishment attacks on young people as young as 12 years old are used to shame and control.

Over 30% of the young people that TTP work with cite fears of paramilitary attacks after release from prison as a reality for them. The complexity of the issues facing these young people led TTP to realise that they needed to strengthen their capacity to provide ongoing support to them. Alongside this they also needed to educate and train employers around key issues that were causing barriers to employment if successfully sustaining conventional employment was to be achieved.

In consultation with the young people they work with, TTP identified four key issues that need addressing to enable successful employment outcomes; 1) Confidence in themselves in a new context – despite having built confidence through the Outwork programme this remains fragile and fear of failure high. This led to the recognition that ongoing support remains vital even after the young person has moved into conventional employment; 2) The ongoing requirement to engage with a variety of mandated services that are not coordinated nor working together. Many young people don't have the skills to manage these relationships, especially when digital knowledge to access websites is required, so are left without vital support or risk not complying with agreed plans. 3) A combination of cost and lack of public transport infrastructure in Northern Ireland makes it nearly impossible to reach work. This has made TTP think about how they can address this issue through the support they offer, and have started recruiting volunteer drivers. 4) Mental health issues. Existing mental health conditions are often exacerbated by the criminal justice system and this has been amplified with the impact of the pandemic and the isolation many have experienced. Without ongoing support to navigate difficult situations that can occur, extreme responses can be triggered in the young people that can impact the positive outcomes they achieve.

Alongside this consultation TTP also consulted with employers who had recruited individuals directly on release from prison in Northern Ireland over the past 12 months. The two main issues they identified were; 1) Young offenders need more 'chances' than mainstream employees and current HR policies and procedures are not designed to offer that level of flexibility without raising issues of unfairness among their other staff. 2) There is no capacity to provide what is seen as ongoing 'social work' to help the young person manage ongoing issues with rebuilding their life, issues that often impact their attendance or behaviour at work.

To address these issues TTP wants to extend support over a two-year period to at least 14 out of 24 young people who have been in transitional employment with them. This will help them to go on to achieve secure employment with external employers. By helping to move these young people on to employment it will also increase the availability of transitional employment opportunities within Outwork and Big Loop Bikes for those who have just been released from prison. TTP will also work with an additional 14 young offenders who have not been in transitional employment with them and help them into Jobstart roles or directly into mainstream employment. Alongside this work will also take place to support employers to provide supportive work places.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1
EKA 1
Secure agreement of at least 5 mainstream employers in Northern Ireland to be part of the programme.
EKA 2
Move at least 6 young people into conventional employment after having been provided with 12 months transitional employment.
EKA 3
Recruit at least 6 volunteer/peer mentors to work with transitional staff.
Request and Budget
TTP is requesting £57,129 over 2 years to cover the costs of working with 20 young people. £27,241 in year 1 - £5,152 (contribution to Director's salary), £16,612 (Mentor/Coach salary – 0.6FTE), £2,477 (overheads), £2,000 (brand design for recruitment platform), £1,000 (volunteer expenses). £29,888 in year 2 - £5,152 (contribution to Director's salary), £11,075 (Mentor/Coach salary – 0.4FTE), £9,944 (Recruitment Support worker), £2,717 (overheads) and £1,000 (volunteer expenses).
Conclusion
<p>The Turnaround Project is a small but influential organisation that has grown into a credible and important stakeholder in the criminal justice sector in Northern Ireland. Much of this is due to Richard, the founder and Director. His knowledge, passion and connections have enabled TTP to become a leading voice in work that helps ex-offenders move into secure employment.</p> <p>TTP was awarded a development grant in 2019 to provide core funding during the start-up phase of Outwork, their ground maintenance social enterprise that provides training and employment to offenders and ex-offenders. This grant was instrumental in enabling TTP to establish itself as a viable and effective organisation. The Outwork social enterprise has, despite the challenges of Covid, built up a steady number of customers (many of whom are corporate contracts) and successfully retained the 'transition' workers who join the project for a 12-month period. This success has led to the establishment of the second social enterprise, Big Loop Bikes, which has strong involvement from Queens College Belfast and is growing.</p> <p>The gap that exists in the programme in terms of moving from transition employment to conventional employment is a key one for TTP. The team understand that despite the success of retaining young people as transition workers this doesn't automatically translate to success in a conventional workplace. Therefore, adding this component to the programme feels like a logical and essential addition. Both recruiting employers who understand the needs of young people who have been through the criminal justice system and providing tangible support to help a young person sustain their job are areas that need investment and resourcing. This application will help with that.</p> <p>Whilst beneficiary numbers may feel quite low the high levels of support justify the time and the costs applied to each individual. Because of the visibility that TTP has in Northern Ireland and the links to Stormont and beyond, the work they do also plays a key role in influencing future policy. This is one of the things that makes this application particularly interesting. With Northern Ireland being relatively small there is the potential for this grant to go beyond the immediate outcomes of employment and reduced reoffending for participants but to also contribute the ongoing debate around offender rehabilitation and the development of employment initiatives for this group.</p>

TTP has managed the impact of Covid well and has used this as an opportunity to reassess their priorities and make sure they have the necessary internal infrastructure in place to sustain ongoing growth. The addition of some new staff to take some of the pressure off Richard and allow him to focus on the strategic development of TTP is a good step towards achieving this and will also free him up to build on his unique skill set and set of relationships with senior and influential local stakeholders.

This proposal is exciting due to the different levels of impact that it has the potential to achieve. This will bring an interesting aspect to the wider portfolio and add value to the work of other grantees. TTP though is also a learning organisation and will equally benefit from being part of a wider group of organisations working towards the same outcomes. This project also builds on the initial support we provided to TTP through their development grant and is a worthwhile development. Therefore, I would strongly recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High
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