

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-11-YO66	Trail-Blazers Mentoring Ltd
Visit Date	Visited By
24 th January 2023	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)

Overall aim of the funding

To further develop work with young offenders aged 18-25 by supporting them into work and further education via mentoring services and employment partnerships through the employment of a Partnerships Manager.

Background to Organisation and governance

Trail-Blazers Mentoring Ltd (TBM) is a registered charity that was registered in 1998. TBM currently employs 10 members of staff and has 80 active volunteer mentors. A number of staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system. The CEO is supported by a board of nine Trustees who bring with them a range of expertise around transformation, banking, the charity sector, vulnerable adults and young people, the prison service, funding and mentoring. Trustee meetings take place quarterly and each Trustee is assigned an area of speciality. In addition, there are five task groups – Finance, Risk, Service Delivery and Partnerships, People, and Funding. These are made up of a mixture of staff and Trustees and meet either monthly or quarterly. One Trustee has lived experience of the criminal justice system and several Trustees are also volunteer mentors.

TBM has a Business Plan that identifies a set of strategic objectives that run from 2021-2024. These cover five key areas; Access, Service, Workforce, Sustainability and Process. Each of these areas have a number of identified strategic actions that are linked to success measures and timelines. The plan is updated quarterly and discussed at Trustee Meetings. TBM has a 10-year vision to be across a much wider footprint and to monetise work over the longer term.

Leadership and expertise

At the assessment I met Julia Alexander (CEO), Carina Kemp (Trustee and Chair) and Peter Simpson (Trustee and Treasurer).

Julia joined TBM in 2020 as their Service Delivery Director and is a trained social worker. She has an extensive background of working in the charity and criminal justice sectors with an expertise in youth and parent mentoring. She describes herself as a reflective leader who is passionate about the sector and young people. She places huge value on listening to staff and those who are being supported about their needs. She moved into the CEO role in 2021 to navigate a way through the pandemic that maximised new opportunities.

Carina has a background as a Transformation Director in the retail and banking sectors. She started mentoring young entrepreneurs through a link to The Princes Trust and became involved with TBM through this route.

Peter is an experienced accountant and Financial Director who has previously worked in senior roles for charities. He joined TBM in 2016 when the charity was going through a period of significant reorganisation.

Aims and Activities

TBM's vision is to end youth reoffending for good and they aim to do this through enabling young offenders to become catalysts for positive change in their communities. They provide mentoring to young offenders to encourage them to make positive changes and provide them with the tools, support, and opportunities they need to continue on their new path when they are released.

TBM recruits volunteer mentors from communities local to where young offenders are serving their sentences who provide weekly one hour mentoring sessions to the young person. These take place both inside prisons and through the gate once the young person is released. Alongside the mentoring the young person also receives crucial intensive practical support in the weeks post release. This support includes providing care packages that include things like smart phones so that the young person can contact their Probation Officer and apply for benefits, bank accounts etc, helping to arrange safe accommodation and once settled helping with education, training, and employment.

In 2021, despite restricted access to prisons, TBM matched 105 mentees with volunteer mentors and 135 mentees were supported, around 50% in prison and the other 50% in the community post release. For those who had access to a TBM mentor, their reoffending rate after one year was 8% compared to the national rate of between 25% and 45%.

Safeguarding

TBM has a detailed safeguarding policy that covers all of their work with over 18-year-olds. This is implemented alongside a Mentoring and Volunteering Policy. The Designated Safeguarding Lead is named in the policy as the CEO and this role is delegated to the Service Delivery Director if the CEO is not available. All Project Managers across TBM are Designated Safeguarding Officers and have a key role in the implementation of the policy.

The policy has recently been overhauled with some external support from a Safeguarding Consultant who was paid for by Lloyds Bank Foundation.

Safeguarding falls under the remit of the Risk Task Group who discuss this at their monthly meetings. Nearly all Trustees have undergone Safeguarding training and all staff receive training as part of their induction and then annual refresher training. Mentors receive ongoing training around Safeguarding, and this is discussed at monthly 1-2-1's. There are around 10 incidents annually that need to be escalated to an external agency.

Finances

Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2021 show income of £417,130 against expenditure of £468,418 resulting in a deficit of £51,288. Net current assets amount to £45,351 and this is also the reserve figure of which all is unrestricted. TBM's reserve policy is to have unrestricted funds, that are not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets, to cover at least six months of unrestricted expenditure. The reserves are not sufficient to cover this currently. Draft figures for year-end Dec 2022 show income of £439,000 and a surplus of £27,000.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show anticipated expenditure of around £470,000 for both years and TBM see this period as a time to consolidate before looking forward to future expansion into more prisons. The majority of funding for 2023 has been secured and includes grants from Comic Relief and Big Lottery and other income has been secured from HMPS for work in six prisons.

Good financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the Operations Support Manager who is supported by the CEO. The Treasurer works with the Operations Support Manager and an external accountant to produce monthly management accounts and cash flow forecasts for the next two years. The Treasurer has a background in finance and ensures that strong processes are in place.

Current Situation and need

Trail-Blazers Mentoring solely supports young people who are involved in the criminal justice system. Many of the, mostly, men they support are early school leavers, have a low level of education attainment, poor levels of literacy and digital and financial management skills. Over 60% of the young men they work with are from BAME communities and a high number have experience of the care system.

Since the pandemic TMB have seen a significant increase in the number of men reporting mental health issues, lack of motivation to engage in activities and a sense of hopelessness about their future. The most frequent reason why young men are referred for mentoring is for support to find employment or access training or education. Poor employment outcomes for young men who have been to prison are well documented, with only 16% securing employment within a year of their release.

During the pandemic, TBM supported over 30% of their mentees into employment or training and they aim to increase this to 45% now that restrictions have been relaxed and greater employment opportunities present themselves. Not having something meaningful to do with free time following release from prison is a key factor in reoffending. Alongside this, trying to survive on benefits alone, especially with the cost-of-living crisis, places many of the young men TBM support at serious risk of poverty, another potential contributing factor to reoffending.

There are many practical barriers to a young offender being able to access the job market, as well as their support needs, they have to build confidence and become work ready. These practical barriers include not having suitable id, not having bank accounts, not knowing how to write CV's or how to apply for a job, not having access to suitable interview clothes and having no experience of interviews. The TBM model relies on volunteer mentors to provide support to young offenders, who consider this support a lifeline to their local communities, keeping them connected and helping them to prepare for release and adjust to life outside of prison. TBM has identified the need to employ a part time Partnerships Manager who will enable the volunteer mentoring model to be expanded and a greater number of volunteer mentors to be recruited. This role will also build links with an increased number of employment and training partners to provide young offenders with routes into employment with employers who are sympathetic to the young person's offending history and who understand the challenges that the young person will be facing. Currently TBM have existing partnerships with a Water Board, a sports organisation, and several recruitment companies. They aim to grow the number and variety of partners to provide increased opportunities across a wider range of sectors. This will help them to achieve the 45% employment rate target they have set themselves.

The Partnership Manager will work with each of the six projects that TBM has running that are linked to HMP Isis, HMP Wandsworth, HMP Brixton, HMP Aylesbury, HMP Brinsford and HMP Oakwood. Each of these projects is run by a Project Manager who links volunteer mentors with young men who are serving sentences and are coming close to a release date. The pandemic has had an impact on the number of people who are volunteering to become mentors and so having extra capacity to drive this forward is a key organisational priority. Linking these mentoring relationships into an

increasing number of employment opportunities is also an area the TBM has identified as in need of extra resource and growth so the Partnerships Manager will focus on this area also.

A grant will enable TBM to employ a Partnerships Manager who will increase the current work being done and also help to build an evidence base of success that will link to further projects being set up in other prisons.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1

EKA 1

30% increase in the number of partners who can offer sustainable work experience, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities.

EKA 2

Increase in the number and diversity of volunteer mentors recruited, including those with lived experience.

EKA 3

Mentees demonstrate improved reintegration into the community and increased uptake of ETE opportunities.

Request and Budget

TBM is requesting **£55,000** over 2 years towards the salary costs of a 0.8 FTE Partnerships Manager.

£30,000 in year 1 - £30,000 (salary).

£25,000 in year 2 - £25,000 (salary).

The full cost of this project over two years is £66,594 and TBM have secured £4,000 from another funder towards the additional costs.

Conclusion

Trail-Blazers Mentoring are a leading mentoring organisation working with young offenders. They are mentioned frequently in applications from a range of organisations about either being a potential partner in their project or having a model that the applicant wants to replicate. When I met with them, I could see why they are held in such high esteem as the outcomes they achieve and the clarity of what they deliver was very clear and impressive. The support their mentors provide is high quality, has clear boundaries and focused on specific outcomes. Mentors are well trained and receive high levels of support and guidance. The time commitment, length of mentoring relationships and number of mentors who return for a new mentee at the natural end of a mentoring relationship demonstrates that this is an expert organisation that knows what it is doing.

This project comes out of a review of what more TBM can do to support young offenders in a post-pandemic landscape. The need to secure a higher number of employment outcomes is seen as being a key factor in TBM being able to achieve their goal of preventing reoffending, and whilst the mentoring takes the young person some of the way having employers warm to employing an ex-offender is a vital part of this.

I did initially wonder how compatible the partnerships development element of the Partnerships Manager role was with increasing volunteer mentor numbers, but when the approach was described to me, I could see that there would be crossover between the two functions. The Project Managers are crucial to the recruitment of volunteers but having someone who can have an overview and pull these recruitments together across all of the projects would make life much easier. And it would free up the Project

Managers to have more time to focus on supporting the mentors and the mentees. TBM were not the only applicant who described the difficulties in recruiting volunteers so having extra capacity is clearly one approach to potentially addressing this. And the mentor model itself is highly effective and produces some strong results around employment outcomes so it would be a shame for it not to continue to grow.

I didn't really understand why TBM hadn't requested the full amount available for a project that costs more than our maximum grant award. Whilst they have secured £4,000 towards these costs this still leaves another £7,594 to be found, £5,000 of which that they could have added to our grant request in year 2. On discussion at the assessment, it appears that this was due to feeling that structuring the request in this way would make it more appealing to funders. However, trying to find this amount of funding from elsewhere, despite being a relatively small amount, feels like an unnecessary burden for TBM. Therefore, I would recommend that in year 2 of the grant we increase the grant award to the full £30,000. This will still leave £2,594 to be found elsewhere but will hopefully make life a bit easier.

Whilst this is an organisation who do mentoring, the links to employment outcomes are strong so I am confident that this fits the criteria and will achieve the wider outcomes that we are looking to achieve through our funding. This grant will enable TBM to grow their approach and become more employment outcome focused. Their expertise around mentoring will be an invaluable subject to share with the rest of the cohort and for those who are also struggling to recruit the numbers of volunteers they have had in the past, this shared challenge will I am sure be a source of discussion and strategizing at the Peer 2 Peer exchanges.

This represents an exciting grant that has the potential to make a big difference to both TBM and the young men they support. With that in mind I would recommend support with a grant of £60,000.

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