

Organisation Name	Reference	2020-05-R011
On the Out		

Visit Date	Visited By
15 th December 2021	Alison Hope

Grant Summary

Life Hab programme supporting prison leavers who have been in prison for a long time. We are funding the development worker who will ultimately be funded by housing benefit.

Visit Details (People met, premises visited etc.)

Helen Brown, CEO via Zoom

Information about the Organisation

On the Out was started by an ex-offender, Michael Edward who had spent 12 years in care and then 12 years in prison and felt that he own needs were not met when he left prison. In particular, he had experienced extreme ongoing trauma, had broken bones, spent time in segregation and family members died while he was inside. This is not unusual for long term prison servers, and is not a consideration in most programmes. He started On the Out with with Helen Brown who I met. They first started meeting people at the prison gate as volunteers and now have a small organisation whose small management team comprises majority ex offenders. This is genuinely unique according to Helen. She said most organisations are run by 'professionals' who engage ex offenders as mentors etc but usually don't pay them. She is the 'professional' (a prison tutor) but the majority of colleagues have long term criminal justice experience.

Michael Edward has created is own programme, based on what he felt he needed when he came out. We are supporting this programme which supports heavily institutionalised ex offenders. A philanthropist has bought a pub which is being turned into accommodation which will be run by ex

offenders for ex offenders while offering a rehabilitation programme Life Hab that tackles effects of institutionalisation (a lack of understanding around how society works, distrust, resistance towards authority, blunted emotional expression)

As well as practical support (ID, benefits, move on accommodation), Life Hab is a system of peer support provided by ex offenders who become train volunteers and then paid members of staff.

The Life Hab model is being evaluated by Manchester University Criminologists, with substance misuse expertise, and their students are conducting interviews.

Issues and Comments

The charity had originally been partnered with an accommodation provider with 45 beds to do this work in Macclesfield but they turned out to be taking advantage and did not pay them as agreed, and On the Out were suddenly liable for any empty places (when no housing benefit was coming in). They ended up getting pro bono support from Amazon's legal advice team and were able to exit the partnership with a small amount of compensation. It sounded like a lucky escape and good on Amazon!

Helen says their biggest challenge is to grow sustainably and particularly to develop appropriate systems and processes, while maintaining the family feel that is a crucial part of their model of working. She has been connected with the Cranfield Trust.

Other Feedback

In addition the organisation/Manchester was picked for a government trial where by Probation Teams/Local Authority have to offer 12 weeks accommodation to prison leavers offering them support and also help to secure move-on accommodation. Originally they did not put themselves forward to be part of the bidding consortium because they felt the bigger more professional providers would win it, but the local probation service approached them, saying ' we can't imagine doing this without you' As you may recall for a number of years ex-offenders have been leaving prison with nowhere to go to, £60 in their pockets and in some instances provided with a tent so at least they don't have to sleep on a park bench. On the Out is involved with 41 beds being offered through this trial.

Helen described this as a good start but that 12 weeks wasn't enough given the trauma and institutionalisation of many prison leavers.

On the Out leads a Manchester Prison Leavers group, which includes recent and less recent prison leavers and all the agencies involved in supporting them. This forum enables all the partners to work collaboratively rather than in silos, strongly informed by those with lived experience. I am really glad we are supporting this organisation.