

# Working with offenders: The Foundation Training Company Ltd

Andy Hope

**'The student is always at the centre of FTC's thinking. The visit to Highpoint demonstrated the commitment and quality of the team. It demonstrated continual efforts to improve delivery and support for the students. Subsequently the students show a high regard for the team and the programmes which they demonstrate in their feedback, body language and achievements' (OCN Moderators' Report).**



Staff and former learners enjoy a break at a recent conference.

## John

John was first referred to FTC whilst serving a sentence in HMP Edmunds Hill. During his time with us he took all elements of the course but it was the first time he had used computers and he loved the challenge.

John had problems around drug addiction and this had impacted on his offending. On release he was referred to our community training and resource centre in Hackney. He arrived highly motivated to change and eager to start. Because of his addictions John was referred to Riverside House, a second-stage rehabilitation centre. He did their training, which was about drug rehabilitation, and we continued to work with him to help achieve his goal of going to college.

Shortly afterwards John was interviewed by a local college and they were impressed with his motivation. He had to undertake a Level II English test which he passed and is going on to take a level II IT course. He hopes this will lead to future courses around IT networking.

Whilst John is in college, FTC continues to work with him to secure voluntary work placements in order to increase his confidence and experience.

## The work of the Foundation Training Company

The pressures of resettlement that face offenders are huge. The individual has to consider a range of serious issues, for example finding suitable housing and work, the impact of their offending behaviour on their lives thus far and rebuilding relationships with family and friends. These pressures may begin to explain the fact that a very large majority people on completion of a custodial or community sentence will re-offend.

The Foundation Training Company is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It was formed for the purpose of developing and running resettlement courses for serving prisoners. The company evolved from a community training project in London which had been in existence since February 1993. FTC currently delivers resettlement training in eleven prisons on behalf of Her Majesty's Prison Service as well as operating two Training and Resource Centres in London and an Alternative to Custody Programme in Essex.

As FTC has matured the original purpose has changed and our aims now reflect the fact that a high proportion of our work is done in the community. Therefore a programme that was set up for serving prisoners now reflects the need to support offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending; this in itself can bring challenges. In a custodial setting FTC has been used to dealing with a 'captive' audience and prisoners have very little choice in where they can go to get resettlement advice and support. Although voluntary, the resettlement course is not a soft option. Once on the course the learners have to face up to many realities and make difficult decisions about their future. Those that complete the five weeks feel more prepared and able to make a change to their lives.

**'It's honest and realistic what they tell you. You know that you cannot hide the fact that you've been to prison but they go through disclosure with you to help you cope with the stigma. I now feel confident that I can look an employer in the eye and disclose it to him without the stress I would have had.'**

**Ex-learner**

In the community FTC receives a steady stream of referrals onto the programme, but there are many distractions for the learner prior to their arrival at a centre. Of the 1408 appointments made at one centre in London, just 858 (61

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, 2004, Reducing Re-offending: National Action Plan. <http://noms.justice.gov.uk/news-publications-events/publications/strategy/reducing-reoffending-action-plan?view=Binary>. The pathways are: Accommodation; Education, training and employment; Mental and physical health; Drugs and alcohol; Finance, benefit and debt; Children and families of offenders; Attitudes, thinking and behaviour.



The FTC learning centre in HMC Wayland (left) and its community-based centre in Lambeth (right), showing the similarity in standard and style.

per cent) were attended. Although this conversion rate is good by conventional standards, it means that many who could benefit from our help and support do not take advantage of what is on offer. A small group of peer mentors are being trained and supported to make contact with those who have been referred to us and encourage them to keep the appointment. We would regard a 70 per cent attendance rate as about the optimum possible in this respect, and it is our objective to achieve this figure by the end of the Centre's second year.

Irrespective of whether a learner joins us in custody or the community, time has taught us that their induction is vital to settle them into the programme quickly. From the very start FTC has put great effort into the learning environment. On setting up the first pre-release course in Feltham, FTC staff were met with disbelief from prison officers when they asked for the delivery area to be painted and carpeted, lighting improved and tea/coffee provided for the learners. However, attitudes soon changed, and a Chief Inspector of Prisons Report stated 'FTC provided an outstandingly motivating atmosphere in their workshops and group rooms.'

The induction process also gives both FTC and the learner time to get to know each other. Many learners, even though they volunteered for the programme, will initially be reluctant to engage fully. There is a feeling, especially amongst repeat offenders, that they will once again be judged and that their support will disappear once they go through the gate. FTC staff work hard to dispel this notion as quickly as possible, through being honest and realistic with the learners and ensuring that their own expectations of what can be achieved in the first few months after release are realistic. As one learner put it 'everyone is wanting to remind you of the reason you are here, [but] the course is about, well you've done all that – so let's talk about what happens when you get out.'

An 'Action and Learning Plan' is produced in conjunction with the learner. The Action Plan element is formed around the seven Resettlement Pathways found in the National

Reducing Re-offending Strategy<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, 2004, Reducing Re-offending: National Action Plan. The pathways are: Accommodation; Education, training and employment; Mental and physical health; Drugs and alcohol; Finance, benefit and debt; Children and families of offenders; Attitudes, thinking and behaviour. The simple premise is to ask the individual 'where they have come from, where are they now and where do they want to get to' in their life. Using this information, goals are set for each individual and a learning plan is set up to underpin these goals whilst on the course. Whilst the learner works towards these goals by following their learning plan in the classroom, a support worker will be doing much of the follow-up work on the action plan by contacting employers, training and accommodation providers and other agencies on release from custody. In the community the learner is encouraged to do much of the contacting of agencies themselves. FTC sees this as a vital strand in confidence-building for the individuals by allowing them to build their own communication and social skills for the future. In custody this is not always possible due to the security restraints placed on the use of telephones and the internet. However, regardless of the learner finding themselves in the community or in custody, daily contact is maintained with the support worker and their Action Plan is constantly reviewed. This Action Plan is a living document for the life of the intervention: it has to be, because as the learner's confidence grows so do their aspirations. Quite early in the programme many learners start to re-appraise their goals and look beyond the first few months in the community to a more sustainable settlement. It is because of this that FTC took the decision to move 'through the gate' with the learners and provide further support in the community.

London was chosen because of the large percentage of prisoners that return there on release from the prisons in East Anglia. Based on the successful model delivered by FTC in custody, the Training and Resource centres allow FTC to deliver resettlement support in a more flexible and individual manner. With regard to security concerns, all referrals are risk-assessed and treated accordingly.

Learners are encouraged to do more for themselves. Every learner is given a hotmail account and encouraged to fill in applications for jobs, training and accommodation, where appropriate online. For those less able, or who do not yet feel confident enough, support is given. But the main objective for everyone in the community is to do as much for themselves as they can. The community programmes have also allowed FTC to employ ex-offenders as managers, tutors and support workers, something that is extremely difficult to do in a custodial setting.

Notwithstanding the difference in locations and staff, commonality is immediately apparent to anyone that visits an FTC programme, either in the community or custody. This also applies to the learning elements. These cover the Skills for Life areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT, with the wider Skills for Life elements of personal development, working with others and improving own learning and performance. All of these are embedded into the programme and learners produce a portfolio of evidence to show how they have covered the curriculum. Portfolios are internally and externally verified, and learners who are successful will receive nationally recognised units of accreditation. In 2008-09, FTC carried out over 11,000 resettlement interventions and to date more than 11,000 people completed courses. 95 per cent of these have achieved at least one nationally recognised award from OCR or OCN. This has resulted in the award of around 12,100 accredited certificates and an immeasurable level of improved self-esteem and confidence. In some cases this will be the first time a learner has received any certificate for learning.

As most of the learning is embedded the learners do not see themselves in a learning or educational environment: they are more likely to think of the new skills they are learning as obvious tools to help them achieve their resettlement goals. Therefore, the larger the portfolio of evidence the greater the indication that the individual is making progress towards those goals and towards their personal development. 'The FTC five-week programme is a tremendous programme that gives prisoners the confidence, knowledge and expertise to prepare for that successful release' (Prison Governor).

The team that delivers this programme varies in size depending on the size of the programme and the location, either in custody or the community, but it always includes a manager, a delivery element (i.e. tutors) a resettlement element (i.e. key support or resettlement tutors) and volunteers. These teams are backed up by central management providing supervisory and development support, quality assurance, administration and financial control. Within the team the manager is pivotal, providing communication with local community groups and resource agencies, and in custody liaising with prison and offender managers. Tutors and resettlement staff have a symbiotic relationship: although the latter have the nominal lead in helping an individual implement their action plan, it is often the tutors who will notice a learner's growing confidence and encourage them to become more ambitious in their plans. To ensure resettlement staff are made aware of these changes, good communication between staff is essential.

In the more structured custodial environment, teams are encouraged to sit together at the end of a morning and afternoon session and discuss what went on over a cup of tea. This allows the resettlement worker to catch up on the learners' aspirations and so become more aware of their needs. In the community, where the learning is more individual, learners' aspirations will be discussed in more detail during the (recorded) weekly team meetings. In all of this the manager is again pivotal, ensuring that communication between the learners and staff is regular and timely. Many staff started as tutors and even volunteers, with approximately 74 per cent starting out at a lower position than they are now. At interview FTC always looks for an 'FTC type of person', someone that shows a real desire to work with this client group and who wants themselves to develop. The majority of staff become qualified to the standards required after they have joined.

Much of the success of FTC relies upon our ability to refer learners to other agencies to deal with their wider needs. The vast majority of learners see their ultimate goal as employment. During induction and initial interview their wider needs will soon become apparent, many of which will have to be dealt with prior to their engaging with prospective employers. These needs could be around dealing with addictions, family re-integration, debt and even health. To meet them we have built up a network of trusted agencies that we can refer to for further support: in return we accept referrals from them to support their clients using our expertise. For example it might become quickly apparent to us that a learner still has an addiction problem; with their consent we will contact an agency that specialises in addictions and ask them to receive our client as a referral. Once the learner is in control of his/her addiction we would expect them to be referred back to us for support in gaining employment. In this way the learner understands that we are not breaking ties with them but they are in fact getting a better service for their immediate need from an expert. In the same way, we will accept referrals from the addiction agency for their clients. 'I can tell a guy who's been with FTC the minute he walks through the door of the hostel. He's different, more focused, ready to commit' (St Edmunds Society, Norwich).

The change in temperament, behaviour and attitude in our learners is reflected in their self-esteem and higher levels of confidence, creating a clear hope for the future: it is on these changes that FTC will continue to build. All agree that a positive attitude towards further education, training and a lawful future is the way forward. As a Prison Governor succinctly put it, 'It may not always count on the scorecard but what they do for individuals represents real opportunity, and the way their staff provide this is excellent.'

**Andy Hope**  
Chief Executive, The Foundation Training  
Company Ltd