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**Training prisoners as hospitality workers: The case of the CLINK charity**

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**Extended Abstract**

In 2009, the first Clink Restaurant opened at HMP High Down in Surrey, when Alberto Crisci, then catering manager, identified the need for formal training, qualifications and support for prisoners in finding a job after release. The Clink Charity's sole aim is to reduce reoffending rates of ex-offenders. The Clink works in partnership with Her Majesty's Prison Service to run projects that train and provide practical skills to prisoners to aid their rehabilitation. The Clink Restaurants allow prisoners to learn, engage with the public and take their first steps towards a new life. More specifically the project provides prisoners with the opportunity to gain experience in food preparation and food service, accredited by the City & Guilds (NVQs Levels 1-3). The Clink now operates training restaurants and catering services in four locations across the country: Brixton, Cardiff, High Down and Styal. The latest available data by the Ministry of Justice suggest that the participation in this training programme helps prisoners reduce the possibility to reoffending by 50% (The Clink Charity, 2018).

The importance of vocational training as a means to reduce recidivism (reoffending) is highlighted by a small number of studies in different correctional systems across the globe. Bahn (2011) links recidivism with community safety and argues for the key role of vocational training as a tool to reduce recidivism for incarcerated offenders; she also identifies challenges on the facilitation of vocational training programmes in Australian prisons and calls for a curriculum change. Quan-Baffour and Zawada (2012) found that prison education triggers a number of positive socio-economic impacts such as the promotion of social cohesion, the re-integration of ex-inmates into the community as reformed members, and the provision of knowledge and skills for employment and self-employment through entrepreneurial activities. Baloch and Jennings (2018) investigated the results of the training effects on offenders with disabilities in the U.S.; the findings of their study demonstrate a consistent and positive relationship between prison training and successful employment opportunities post-release. Vineetha and Raghavan (2018) suggest that prison training programmes are not only about learning new skills, but also strengthening the will to work, sense of self-help, and team work by having prisoners work with others in a regulated environment. They also identify a number of weaknesses in the Indian criminal justice system focused on the incarceration of criminals alone (Vineetha and Raghavan, 2018). Piacentini et al. (2018) found that training and employment in Scottish prisons is often low-skilled, repetitive, poorly paid, and has little connection either to individual interests or the local labour market. They also found that a recent Scottish government initiative has embraced the potential of partnerships with third-sector and commercial organisations as a means of improving employment and vocational training within prisons.

The current study aims to explore the transformation process “from prisoner to hospitality worker” from the offenders’ and ex-offenders’ perspective. The project is divided into two phases, the initial quantitative phase (survey) funded by Bournemouth University Acorn funding scheme, and a future qualitative phase (in-depth interviews) that will require further (external) funding and expertise (i.e. involvement of social scientists and/or social workers). This paper discusses the findings that emerged from the quantitative phase. A survey questionnaire was compiled in order to assess the quality of the training programme from the participants’ perspective as well as the programmes’ impact on the participants’

wellbeing and overall contribution to rehabilitation. The questionnaire was designed based on a survey employed by the Prisoner Education Trust in the UK (Taylor, 2014). The survey questionnaire was approved initially by the Clink charity and then by the BU Research Ethics Committee in June 2018 and then hard copies were distributed to trainee-prisoners in all four locations where Clink operates restaurants. Due to security restrictions the questionnaires were posted to the Clink headquarters which helped in the completed survey collection. The following section provides a brief overview of the findings.

All respondents were UK nationals and the vast majority (83.3%) were of a white ethnic /cultural background. From the 36 respondents (n=36), 31 (86.1%) were in prison for the first time; the sample represents approximately 30% of the prisoners participating in this programme at the time the survey was conducted. In total 8 men (1 from Cardiff, 7 from High Down) and 28 women (from Styal) participated in this survey, with 92% between the age of 22 and 60. The majority (75%) of respondents had training at NVQ2 level and 22 (61.1%) out of 36 were as restaurant customer service staff, with only 1 graduate having training in both a kitchen and a restaurant. In terms of special needs and/or learning disabilities, only one graduate reported being diagnosed with LDD (dyslexia).

Almost 75% of the graduates were positive about the initial assessment of their learning needs and aspirations and their role in identifying goals and the ways to achieve them (80.5%). There was less agreement on support from the prison on achieving their learning needs and goals (58.3% positive), and some (19.4%) felt that ILP wasn't reviewed regularly enough. 63.9% of respondents felt they were encouraged to progress to higher level of learning but only 19.5% agreed that they received useful advice from National Careers Service. The strongest motivations for training were (in descending order): 'wanted to occupy my time usefully' (94.5%); '*wanted to challenge myself*' (83.3%); '*wanted to improve my employment prospects on release*' (80.6%); '*wanted to make my family proud of me*' (77.7%); '*wanted to pursue an interest*' (75.1%); '*wanted to get a qualification*' (72.3%). The highest benefits of the training were reported as an increase in (in descending order): '*self-esteem /confidence*' (91.6%); '*ability/desire to learn*' (83.3%); '*ability to help others*' (83.3%); '*health and well-being*' (83.3%); '*chances of getting a job*' (80.6%); '*ability*

to cope with prison' (75%); 'communication skills' (72.3%); 'outlook on life and future' (72.2%). The trainees' future plans were dominated by 'getting a job' (91.7%), 'helping others through voluntary work' (55.6%) and 'starting own business / self-employment' (52.8%) followed far behind and further training and learning not being an attractive option for the majority of respondents.

This study is expected to create a high impact from both theoretical (high quality publications) and practical / managerial perspective, by enhancing our understanding of the rehabilitation process through hospitality vocational training. This will be among the first studies to investigate the successful combination of vocational training in prison in a commercially viable hospitality operation (in this case a fine dining training restaurant).

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