

Second Year Progress Report for The EQ Foundation Employing ex-offenders, bridging the UK skills gap

In December 2016, The EQ Foundation generously match funded £7,500 of online donations raised by Blue Sky as part of the Big Give's Christmas Challenge. The funding contributed towards the implementation of our growth strategy and in particular three key aims:

1. To diversify and win commercial contracts in new industries to create new jobs for ex-offenders
2. Develop new training programmes that are linked to jobs in new contracts/industries
3. Employing and supporting ex-offenders within new commercial contracts

This report summarises our key outcomes and achievements in implementing our strategy over the 12 month period between January and December 2017 and also sets out our objectives for the year ahead.

About Blue Sky

Blue Sky is an award-winning charity, now merged with the former Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt) to form The Forward Trust, supporting ex-offenders and people suffering from substance misuse issues into employment, to alleviate the poverty, hardship and disadvantage often faced by this beneficiary group due to their criminal records. We employ ex-offenders, in paid jobs, for up to six-months through one of two commercial models, during which time we support them (through a dedicated in-work support team and access to training grants and interest-free loans) in finding a longer-term, sustainable job elsewhere:

1. **Blue Sky Agency:** through which we directly employ ex-offenders and place them within the teams of commercial partners (offering companies in a range of industry sectors an alternative to high-street agency labour). Ex-offenders employed through this model are supported by Blue Sky through regular on-site visits and telephone contact.
2. **Blue Sky Services:** through which we directly recruit, manage and supervise teams of 4-5 ex-offenders to deliver grounds maintenance and related environmental services for local authorities, parish councils and business parks.

Since 2005, **Blue Sky has directly employed 1,513 ex-offenders**, with 626 (41%) of these individuals progressing into longer-term employment with our support, and only 9% re-offending during their 6 month period with us (compared to a national rate of 29.6% - Ministry of Justice, January 2018).

Progress against aims

1. To diversify and win commercial contracts in new industries to create new jobs for ex-offenders

Diversification of industries

Through our Agency model as the main driver of creating employment opportunities for ex-offenders, we continue to work closely with long-standing clients such as Veolia, Amey and Quadron id Verde to supply operatives for their local authority contracts to deliver Grounds Maintenance and Waste Management, our core areas of work. In line with our original target of creating 2-3 new commercial contracts in new industries, in the last year we have built relationships with employers in the following industries:

- **Food manufacturing** - working with companies such as Adelle
- **Bus driving** - with the HCT Group
- **Construction** - working with Powerday (endorsement featured to the right)



New employment model – ‘brokerage’

We have also developed a new employment model ‘brokerage’ - which differs from our traditional Agency model in that we recruit and place ex-offenders with partner employers rather employ them directly ourselves, while still providing ‘in-work support’. The model is ‘customer-centred’ in that we seek to match ex-offenders’ interests and employment aspirations with a range of companies in different sectors, some small and local, others major high-street names (that is, we start by asking the beneficiary the kind of job they want and try to find them a suitable opportunity). Following investment in a new dedicated team of Employment Coaches to implement this brokerage model, we have successfully placed 91 ex-offenders (not included in the total above) into employment since April 2017. New industry sectors opened by the model include:



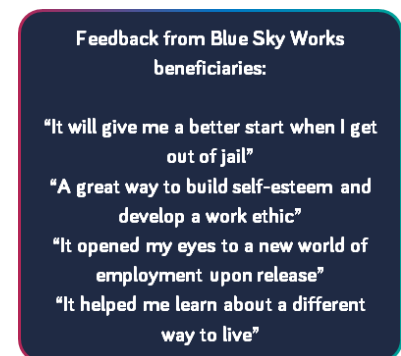
- **Retail:** providing staff to fill Sales Assistant vacancies for Argos and Sainsbury’s on a part and full-time basis
- **Hospitality:** securing opportunities with Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts and filling Receptionist vacancies for Premier Inn
- **Leisure:** exploring relationships with various leisure centres and gyms to secure entry level opportunities related to health and lifestyle
- **Travel:** working with MBNA Thames Clippers to fill a variety of vacancies (e.g. Barista, Stallman etc.) on the fleet of boats

2. Develop new training programmes that are linked to jobs in new contracts/industries

Development of new training

In line with our original aim of developing and running 2-3 new training programmes to reflect industry skills gaps, we have extended the range of courses that we deliver in addition to grounds maintenance and waste management (supporting our core areas of work). Our Blue Sky Works training, which we delivered to 263 individuals (far exceeding our target of reaching and engaging 150 individuals) now includes:

- **Construction skills** - in line with the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)
- **Driving skills** - in line with the Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC)
- **Cleaning and domestic services** - with particular regard to the new hospitality jobs we are creating through our brokerage model
- **Facilities management** - a skills gap we have identified through relationships with our commercial contractors
- **Catering** - focused on entry level skills into the industry
- **Health and safety** - a transferable skills course valid across a range of sectors



We have also started to combine targeted vocational training (that meets the needs of Blue Sky’s commercial partners) with activities to build motivation, confidence, resilience and wider employability skills. This new suite of courses, entitled ‘Head, Heart & Hands’, brings together the best of The Forward Trust’s experience (Blue Sky’s employer-facing knowledge and experience, and RAPT’s expertise in supporting people with substance misuse problems to change attitudes, thinking and behaviour):



- **Heart:** Motivation to change; Personal strengths; Case studies of success; Job Planet: interactive resource to raise awareness of job and career opportunities in different sectors; Goal setting
- **Head:** Getting a job: interview preparation, disclosure, body language; Keeping the job: do’s and don’ts of the work place, ‘10 ways to lose your job’; Preparing for release: overcoming barriers; Resilience, staying safe, and confidence building
- **Hands:** Range of entry-level awards and tickets for industries such as grounds maintenance, waste management, construction skills, driving skills, cleaning and domestic services, health and safety, facilities management and catering

Developing links with prisons where training programmes can be delivered

In the last calendar year, we engaged 2 new prisons and now deliver our Blue Sky Works training programmes in 7 prisons across London, including HMP Belmarsh, HMP Isis, HMP Onley, HMP Pentonville, HMP Wandsworth, HMP Wormwood Scrubs and Young Offenders Institute (YOI) Feltham. Furthermore, we have extended delivery to 5 new London Boroughs, providing employability training to ex-offenders in Bexleyheath, Brent, Brixton, Croydon, Hackney, Ilford, Islington, Lewisham and White City.

3. Employing and supporting ex-offenders within new commercial contracts

Employment outcomes

Between January and December 2017, we successfully employed 167 ex-offenders, with 84 of these individuals progressing into onward employment with other companies. Of these figures, 27 ex-offenders were employed in new industry sectors (16 in food manufacturing, 3 in bus driving, 7 in construction and 1 in leisure) and 15 moved into onward employment within these sectors. This exceeds our original target of employing 25 ex-offenders into jobs in new industries, with 50% (12-13) of these individuals moving into onward employment with commercial partners.

Sheridan had been in and out of crime for most of his adult life.

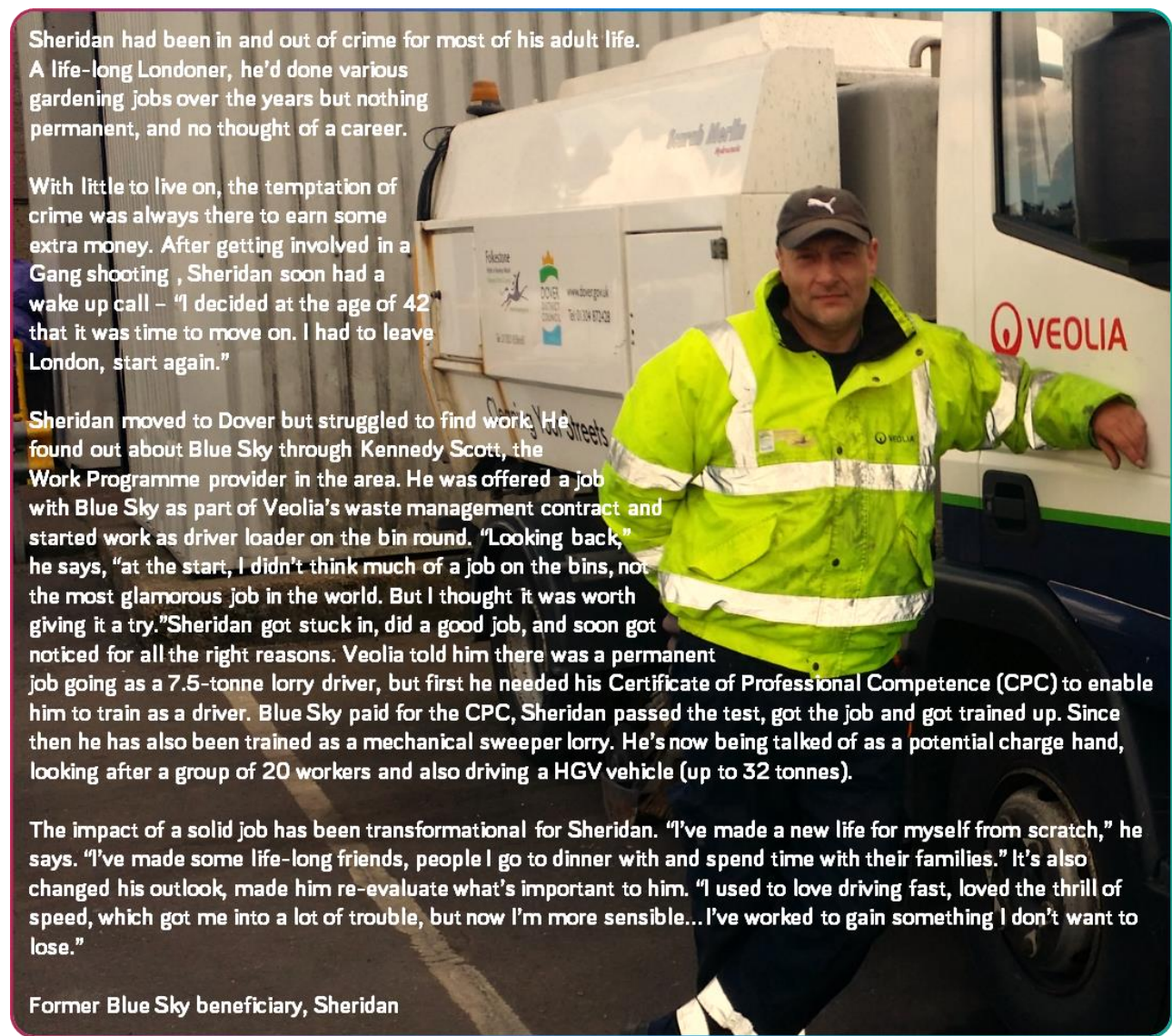
A life-long Londoner, he'd done various gardening jobs over the years but nothing permanent, and no thought of a career.

With little to live on, the temptation of crime was always there to earn some extra money. After getting involved in a Gang shooting, Sheridan soon had a wake up call – "I decided at the age of 42 that it was time to move on. I had to leave London, start again."

Sheridan moved to Dover but struggled to find work. He found out about Blue Sky through Kennedy Scott, the Work Programme provider in the area. He was offered a job with Blue Sky as part of Veolia's waste management contract and started work as driver loader on the bin round. "Looking back," he says, "at the start, I didn't think much of a job on the bins, not the most glamorous job in the world. But I thought it was worth giving it a try." Sheridan got stuck in, did a good job, and soon got noticed for all the right reasons. Veolia told him there was a permanent job going as a 7.5-tonne lorry driver, but first he needed his Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) to enable him to train as a driver. Blue Sky paid for the CPC, Sheridan passed the test, got the job and got trained up. Since then he has also been trained as a mechanical sweeper lorry. He's now being talked of as a potential charge hand, looking after a group of 20 workers and also driving a HGV vehicle (up to 32 tonnes).

The impact of a solid job has been transformational for Sheridan. "I've made a new life for myself from scratch," he says. "I've made some life-long friends, people I go to dinner with and spend time with their families." It's also changed his outlook, made him re-evaluate what's important to him. "I used to love driving fast, loved the thrill of speed, which got me into a lot of trouble, but now I'm more sensible...I've worked to gain something I don't want to lose."

Former Blue Sky beneficiary, Sheridan



Future plans

Merger with RAPt

In June 2017, the trustees of the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoner Trust (RAPt) – a charitable organisation (registered charity no. 1001701) supporting prisoners and ex-offenders in the community to overcome substance misuse issues - voted to move towards full financial integration with Blue Sky.

In order to ensure consistency for our beneficiaries, the name Blue Sky will remain as a 'sub brand' of The Forward Trust to describe our unique offer of real work for ex-offenders, and our related employment services such as in-prison training. The name 'RAPt' will also continue as a sub-brand to denote specific treatment programmes, synonymous with excellence in the field of substance misuse.

Service development

Over the next year, we will be developing some of our key services to ensure that we are able to maximise on the potential reach and impact we can have as a merged entity. Key areas of development will include:

- **Increasing reach in prison:** RAPt provides substance misuse services in 20 prisons and Blue Sky Works delivers training in 5 other distinct prisons – representing 20% of the prison estate in England/Wales. By integrating substance misuse support with employability provision, we can appeal to even more prisons.
- **More integrated work in the community:** In April 2017 Forward started to deliver the community substance misuse contract in East Kent and also re-won the contract to deliver substance misuse services in the Kent Prisons, with Blue Sky working closely with the Substance Misuse team to support people coming through treatment into jobs in the local community. This model provides the blueprint for working in other geographies, linking prison and community provision.
- **A wider range of employment opportunities:** In addition to the ongoing development of Blue Sky's direct employment opportunities and our brokerage service, new initiatives include:
 - **Enterprise:** Piloting self-employment support for people in recovery from addiction and ex-offenders seeking to start their own business, including small seed capital funding
 - **Apprenticeships:** Expanding on RAPt's award-winning apprentice programme (HR Excellence Awards 2017) that provides training and support for people in recovery
 - **Employability:** Life Skills and Vocational Training - delivered in local Job Centres to capture those clients who don't necessarily identify their criminal conviction as a barrier to employment
 - **Individual Placement Support (IPS):** exploring a pilot programme whereby people in recovery are supported into work by a specialist coach who also supports the employer to make the workplace responsive to the client's needs
- **Family support:** We are developing and evaluating a comprehensive programme of services, *Connections*, to help service users nurture, maintain and improve their relationships with family members – the only family service of its kind dedicated to people with substance misuse problems
- **Housing support:** in late 2017, Forward acquired Vision Housing, a small London-based charity providing housing advice and support to ex-offenders, adding significant value to our overall offer of support

Other achievements

Representation

Kate Markey (former Blue Sky Managing Director and current Director of Employment Services for Forward), joined the board of the Employment and Related Support Association (ERSA), the trade body for the employability sector, in recognition of our achievement and expertise in supporting ex-offenders into work.

Awards

Blue Sky was shortlisted for two national awards for our partnership with Amey: the National CSR Awards for 'Partnership in the Community', and the Better Society Award for 'Innovation'. Blue Sky Teams Director Steven Finn also won the HACRO Award for 'Above and Beyond' in acknowledgement of his support for hundreds of ex-offenders over the years (Steve is pictured to the right receiving the award from Will Hobhouse, High Sheriff for Hertfordshire).



Contact details

Thank you for taking the time to read our funding report. If you would like to find out more about our services, please contact:

Chandni Radia, Head of Fundraising | Email: chandni.radia@forwardtrust.org.uk | Tel: 020 3752 5603/07484 023 062