

# Community Planning Aberdeen Case Study:

## Achieving Better Outcomes, My Way to Employment Project

### Context


Through the **Aberdeen City Community Planning Partnership's [Local Outcome Improvement Plan \(LOIP\)](#)**, Community Planning Aberdeen's vision is for Aberdeen to be a place where all can prosper. Recognising the inequalities experienced by people with convictions, the Partnership through the LOIP included an **improvement aim** which aimed to: "increase the number of individuals on a custodial sentence, Community Payback Order with a Supervision Requirement, Unpaid Work Orders, Remand, or Diverted from Prosecution who are being supported to make progress on the Employability Pipeline to 30".

Community Planning Aberdeen sought to **reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for people engaged in the Justice System** by focussing on developing approaches enabling people to access the support they require at the earliest opportunity, creating opportunities to improve personal outcomes and reduce reoffending behaviour. A project which aimed to achieve this improvement aim was established.

### The Project

A Project Team was brought together in October 2021, consisting of public and third sector organisations with experience of working directly with customers and service users including: Skills Development Scotland, Aberdeen City Council's employability and skills team (ABZWorks), HMP Grampian's offender outcomes team, Aberdeen City Council Justice Social Work, Youth Social Work, DWP, North East Scotland College, Aberdeen Foyer, Apex Scotland, SHMU and Aberdeen Cyrenians. **Collaboration** across the system was a key principle and underpinned all that the project sought to do.

Hospitality firm Greene King was at the time, like the rest of the sector, experiencing recruitment challenges and seeking new sources of recruitment. CFine, a local third sector organisation providing volunteering opportunities for vulnerable people came together with the project team and quickly identified that by providing training to prisoners before release, and building relationships with the Greene King team, the aims of all parties could be achieved and life-changing differences could be made to some of the people residing in HMP Grampian.



This project was focused on supporting individuals to make **progress along the Employability Skills pathway** and not solely on positive destinations as some individuals need more support than others to progress and can take time to move between stages of the pipeline. Engagement with the project can be a positive step in itself.

This project aimed to test multi-partner approaches and not to duplicate the excellent work that single agencies do in this field. The project implemented the following key changes to support individuals in making progress along the Employability Skills pipeline:

- Development of a community and prison employability pathway.
- Pre-release support offer including pre-release job interviews with specific employers.
- Installation of a training kitchen within the prison.
- Training delivered by prison staff and the Greene King team.
- Development of a “My Way to Employment” handbook.
- Combined approach to employer and employability approach.
- Pre-release engagement through ABZWorks keyworkers to ensure as much employability support and through care is in place prior to release as possible.

As the project was mainstreamed, the Council’s housing service agreed to provide accommodation as close to the workplaces as possible for the participants upon release, or on a bus route which would take them to work. Steps were put in place to ensure that wrap around support, including in-work employability support would be provided to help the participants not only take up the offer of employment, but to sustain it.

## Impact

There was initially some reluctance among the prison population to take the opportunity. However, as the first cohort of four men progressed steadily through their training, told others on their wings of what they were doing, and brought the food they had cooked back to their respective wings, interest in the project grew and grew.

The project had a positive impact on the individuals involved, who gained confidence, skills, qualifications, and employment opportunities and demonstrated a successful collaboration between Aberdeen City Council, Skills Development Scotland, HMP Grampian, Greene King, CFine, DWP, NESCol and Third Sector partners. Through the collaboration two new pathways to employment were developed.

One individual, who had many convictions, had never had a job and did not believe he ever would. He expressed determination to take advantage of this opportunity, saying that any time he had been released previously there was nothing for him and no hope, so he would immediately return to drug use. This time he had something to look forward to and a real opportunity, he was determined to stay “clean” and turn his life around on release.

“The way I was before was no good. Taking drugs and all that, I’m done with all that. If I was still out there today then I would probably be dead. This job saved me. I can’t wait to get out there and get started”  
– Kevin, Project Graduate

 [Click here to hear more from Kevin](#)



Inmates being trained at a replica Greene King kitchen in HMP Grampian. Image: JASPERIMAGE



Ricky, Steven, Keiran and Kevin- the first four graduates from the project. Image: JASPERIMAGE

“I had never worked in a kitchen before, but now I’ve been taught everything – I can cook, and have a job lined up as well as a permanent flat. It’s so important to get that good start after release, so that you don’t fall back into bad habits.”  
– Steven, Project Graduate

As a result of all the hardwork, the project achieved its aim, with **63 individuals progressing at least one stage along the employability skills pipeline**, and **36 (57%) in a positive destination**.

The My Way to Employment Project was shortlisted for and subsequently won the ‘achieving better outcomes for the most vulnerable’ category at **COSLA Excellence Awards in September 2024**.

As the project had achieved its improvement aim, it is now working towards another: “Increase by 50% the number of work able people on orders and leaving prison engaging with employability support by 2026.”