

The Centre for Social Justice  
11 Belgrave Road | London | SW1V 1RB  
020 7592 1160  
[www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)



Release date: Embargoed until 00:01 Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2014

**PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

## **Army of 15,000 mentors could slash reoffending rates, says Jonathan Aitken in new report**

*Roll out of mentoring schemes could be a 'game-changer' in drive to slow revolving door culture of reoffending, former Cabinet Minister says in new Centre for Social Justice study*

Ambitious plans to slash the £11 billion-a-year cost of reoffending by recruiting an army of mentors to work with ex-prisoners are outlined today in a major new report from a leading think-tank.

The report from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) says mentoring should be crucial to the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation strategy, which will see 21 new community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) set up to support low and medium risk offenders.

It has been written by CSJ Fellow, Jonathan Aitken, the former Conservative MP and Cabinet Minister who served seven months in HMP Belmarsh in 1999/2000 and who has since successfully mentored a dozen offenders.

The Ministry of Justice estimates that some 53,000 low and medium risk ex-prisoners will be looked after by the new CRCs. Based on evidence from mentoring organisations, Mr Aitken estimates that 15,000 professional and voluntary mentors could be recruited over the next five years to help them and tackle reoffending.

This would be paid for out of the £450 million annual budget that the Government has allocated for its Transforming Rehabilitation strategy.

The report says that such a workforce is necessary to cut high rates of reoffending – currently 58 per cent of prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months in jail reoffend within a year of release.

It says mentoring should begin before prisoners are released from jail and continue beyond the prison gates. Mr Aitken writes that a mentoring relationship is “intensely personal” and that flexibility will be essential.

“Mentoring is not a box-ticking exercise. It is a human engagement of trust, encouragement, guidance and hope,” he says.

“We know that the mentoring of offenders is challenging. We know it works in an impressive swathe of individual cases, small though the present numbers are.

“The fact that these cases have never properly been counted, measured or expanded on a wider scale is a fault line in the present criminal justice system. The Transforming Rehabilitation strategy is a courageous attempt to correct such past faults.

“Its emphasis on the wide-scale mentoring of offenders creates a new game-changer that can massively increase the chances of making the strategy succeed.”

The report reveals that mentoring has fallen out of favour over the last 50 years. At one time it was an integral part of the work of the Probation Service, though known then as “befriending” and “caring” and frequently delivered by volunteers.

But such people were “pushed aside by jobsworths, whose bureaucratic expansionism made them determined to suppress the work done with offenders by anyone not on the official payroll”, Mr Aitken adds.

The report reveals that there is a surplus of potential mentors willing to volunteer. Their recruitment is being held back by the low number of referrals coming from the prison and probation services.

In recent years, mentoring has come back into fashion on a small and informal scale. A large proportion of the work is being done by just 40-50 charities, mostly paid for by non-government sources. Currently there are only around 3,000 mentors in England and Wales, of whom roughly 90 per cent are part-time volunteers.

Christian Guy, Director of the CSJ, said: “Our reoffending rates in England and Wales are shameful: more than half of prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months reoffend within a year of release. We pay a heavy social and economic price for this failure.

“All political parties should become more ambitious in helping offenders turn their lives around. This isn't about pandering to those who have done wrong – it is about dealing with the root causes of crime to protect us all.”

The report profiles a number of small charities with impressive results in reducing reoffending rates. These include:

- **Pecan Moving On**, which works with women offenders at several London prisons, has a reoffending rate of only 16 per cent;
- **The Clink Charity**, which trains offenders to work in prison restaurants, has a reoffending rate of 6 per cent;
- **Blue Sky**, which has a reoffending rate of 15 per cent, employs 800 released prisoners on labouring jobs with local councils.

**Ends**

**Notes to the editor**

The report highlights that each voluntary mentor is likely to cost around £30 per week or £1,500 a year on travel expenses, subsistence costs, telephone calls and other personal items. The salary of professional mentors is around £20,000 pa.

For media enquiries, please contact Ross Reid from the Centre for Social Justice on 07780 707322 or Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003.

### **About the CSJ**

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics. In June, the CSJ was awarded UK Social Policy Think Tank of the Year 2013 at Prospect magazine's Think Tank Awards.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, Breakthrough Britain. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by Prospect Magazine in 2008.

Since Breakthrough Britain the CSJ has published over 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. These have included the seminal papers Dying to Belong, Dynamic Benefits and Locked Up Potential, which was chaired by Jonathan Aitken.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of over 300 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations. The CSJ is able to draw upon the expertise and experience of Alliance charities for research work and media inquiries. Journalists wishing to conduct grass-roots research into social problems can be put in touch with front-line charity directors and staff.