

# 2023 REPORT

ANS Research

*Social Entrepreneurship as a  
reintegrative solution for  
ex-prison residents.*



In partnership with  THE UBELE INITIATIVE

*Can Social Entrepreneurship  
opportunities act as a viable  
avenue for 18-24 year old Black  
ex-prison residents to  
reintegrate back into society?*

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**The contents and opinions expressed in this report are those of the participants and authors only.**

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# MEET THE TEAM



## ANS Research



**Ammaarah Felix** is an educator, researcher and consultant on all things gender, race and reproductive justice related. She specialises in youth work and education. Ammaarah has spent most of her career supporting the Black, South Asian and Muslim communities she belongs to.



**Naomi Robinson** is a researcher and consultant, with experience conducting user research in the technology industry as well as social/community research. Naomi contributes to work within youth employment as a Youth Advisory Board Member at Youth Futures Foundation.



**Sharon Tamale** is an educator, most recently supporting Law and Criminal Justice students. Sharon has recently completed her Masters in Education focusing on how prison education aids the rehabilitation and reintegration of young Black boys leaving prison. Since working in two London prison establishments, Sharon is keen to continue her career in supporting those who have been released from prison and are now ready to live a law-abiding life.

## Supported by The Jane Hatfield Award

The Jane Hatfield Award is an annual grant for young researchers to investigate issues or topics related to community, social action and/or social justice. It was launched this year by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR), in partnership with The Ubele Initiative. Our organisations are passionate about supporting the next generation of researchers and activists, with a focus on young researchers from Black and minoritised communities. Our aim has been to start with an Award and then leave the rest – defining the research question; shaping the design and research team – up to the individuals involved. The Award is named in memory and celebration of Jane Hatfield: Trustee and then Chair of IVAR between 2006 to 2021.



# INTRODUCTION





Typically, “success” in Black communities is measured by obtaining useful qualifications, securing stable employment or starting up businesses. However, within these communities, structural barriers such as overcrowded housing, poor health outcomes and limited access to support can limit the social mobility of an individual. As a result, some young men facing these barriers have experience of the criminal justice system. Considering the fact that only 3% of the population in England and Wales are Black, Black men are three times more likely to be arrested in comparison to their white counterparts, with a rate of 10-11% of Black people prosecuted and convicted in criminal courts and 13% inside prisons (Gov. UK, 2021; Gov.UK, 2022).

**3x**

**Black men are 3 times more likely to be arrested in comparison to white men.**

**10-11%**

**10-11% of Black people are prosecuted and convicted in criminal courts.**

**13%**

**13% of Black people are inside prisons.**

Our project takes a unique stance in finding a potential opportunity where young men with prison experience can engage with business models as a solution to create opportunities for themselves whilst benefiting the communities that they are returning to. We take a reflective research approach; unpicking what ex-prison residents feel about Social Entrepreneurship, hearing how they feel it could aid their social reintegration then using their suggestions to provide recommendations on how this could work in practice.



# TERMINOLOGY



We acknowledge that language is constantly changing and that the terminology used institutionally does not affirm all experiences. The language used in our report mirrors the terms used by the young men to describe *their experiences*. Where possible, we have prioritised self-identification.

Unless stated otherwise, the following phrases below have been used with these descriptions:

**Black:** Individuals who identify as being of African and Caribbean ethnic descent.

**Men:** 'Men' is inclusive of people who are socially gendered as men, who are assigned male at birth, and those who feel the term 'man' describes their identity.

**Young Men:** Men between the ages of 18 and 24.

**Social Enterprise:** A business with social objectives that focuses on the reinvestment of their organisation and the community it serves, rather than the need to maximise profit (DTI 2002; Durham University report, 2011).

**Direct experience with the criminal justice system:** Individuals who have personally had experience with the police, criminal courts (mainly Magistrates and Crown), probation and prison.

**Ex-prison residents:** Individuals who have spent time in custody either on remand, with a spent or unspent conviction.

Terms like 'ex-offender', 'incarcerated' and 'formerly incarcerated' have also been used by interviewees to describe their experiences.

# LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS



## Social Entrepreneurship related programmes for ex-prison residents up until today

The relationship between Social Enterprises and the UK criminal justice system exists with positive examples of providing opportunities for service users in the justice system. For example, probation services directly liaise with social entrepreneurs as part of some of their service users' pre/released sentence plans. Below are examples of organisations who specifically work to empower ex-prison residents by broadening their business acumen, with the consideration of giving back to the community they are returning to.

**Bounce Back UK**, is a charity and Social Enterprise, focusing on training and employing ex-prison residents in the construction industry. In addition to the many trades that they prepare their students for, they also address a variety of their complex needs. For example, coaching during criminal proceedings and substance misuse support. As of today, they are also developing a rough sleepers project which aims to be in service soon.

**The Clink Charity** is another brilliant organisation who work with those who are serving custodial sentences and due to be released. They focus on gaining formal catering qualifications then supporting graduates, who are released, into paid roles within the industry. They also take a holistic approach by offering support with accommodation upon release too.

**Cracked IT** used to work with ex-prison residents, as well as youth who they considered are at risk of entering the criminal justice system. Students learnt how to repair mobile devices whilst attending employability workshops, engaged in mentoring and other personal support services. Unfortunately, Cracked IT closed in January 2021 due to the impact of Covid.

All of these programmes seem to have some, if not, great levels of success. So, we want to understand how we can contribute to the growth of this industry, and in particular, programmes that are steered by people who want to stay out of the system.

In addition to this, there seems to be no direct research focussing on the positive effect of Social Entrepreneurship from certain ethnic groups who are disproportionately represented in the UK criminal justice system, namely young Black men from African/Caribbean descent. For this reason, we spoke to young men, who have been released from prison to find out:

- **Their levels of knowledge and experience of Social Enterprises before entering the prison system?**
- **How prison resettlement offerings incorporate any type of Social Entrepreneurship guidance as part of their pre-release support?**
- **If, in fact, Social Enterprises are effective tools for rehabilitation and social reintegration?**

# RESEARCH PROCESS





To address our research questions above, we recruited 12 Black men aged between 18-24 years old, with direct experience of the UK prison system. We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, between May 2022 to December 2022.

Using a quantitative questionnaire, we asked respondents to share their personal career aspirations and what they understood of the term 'Social Entrepreneurship'. To start building a picture of how prison may have contributed to their career goals and potential enterprise plans, we asked direct questions on how prison programmes prepared them with this. We used these responses as a pre-assessment for the 1-2-1 interview stage.

For this second stage, we did qualitative semi-structured interviews inspired by the key insights from the questionnaire. The approach of synthesising the answers from the questionnaires into the semi-structured interview questions worked well as the majority of our participants were being introduced to the term 'Social Entrepreneurship' for the first time through us.

Each interview took place online on Zoom for 45 minutes - 1 hour. Sessions were recorded (with verbal and written consent from the participants), then analysed after each interview following each session. The quotes and key insights used within this report are anonymised and the findings from the interview have been influential in shaping the Calls to Action section of our report.



# KEY FINDINGS





## Levels of knowledge and experience of Social Enterprises before entering prison

**Of our 12 respondents, 10 had little to no knowledge of Social Entrepreneurship prior to the interviews.** At the start of our interviews, participants were able to deduce the basis of 'Social Enterprise' from its name but were unaware of how to start one or where to learn more about it.

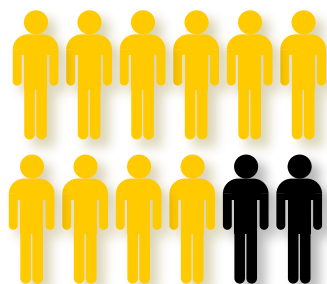
The comparisons between Social Enterprises and businesses were interesting, with the latter appearing to be the less risky of the two as it is solely driven by profit. However, some participants viewed a community based business as a shared risk, "where if you have to start again, you do it together."

All interviews concluded with a better understanding of Social Entrepreneurship and the majority would have liked to learn more about it whilst in prison if given the option.

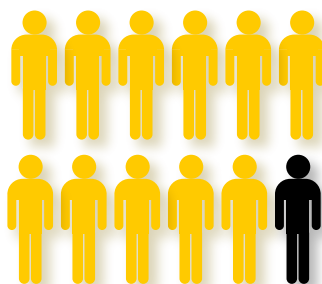
## Do prison rehabilitation programmes provide information about Social Entrepreneurship opportunities?

Our interviewees all reflected on their time in prison differently, with some wanting to use their time to learn more and develop certain skills, others wanting to use short courses to help fill their time, and another saying that his main focus was getting out as soon as possible.

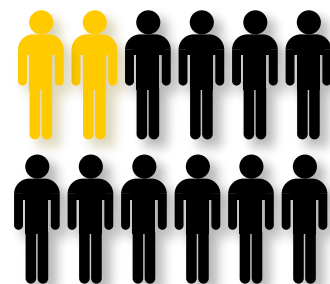
**11 of the 12 respondents reported no education on the topic whilst in prison and only one was offered startup or entrepreneurship opportunities whilst living in prison.** By contrast, most had been offered some form of vocational course on manual trade like plumbing, engineering, woodwork and carpentry. **Just two of our 12 participants did not engage in any educational opportunities whilst in prison.** Although construction related training can often lead to self employment, respondents did not speak about their understanding of the feasibility of any type of start up within these industries.



Of our 12 respondents, 10 had little to no knowledge of Social Entrepreneurship.



11 of the 12 respondents reported no education on the topic whilst in prison.



2 of our 12 participants did not engage in any educational opportunities whilst in prison.

**This tells us...education and information on Social Enterprise is inaccessible in prison.**

It is clear that education and information on Social Entrepreneurship is not readily available or accessible before, during or after time in prison. It is also clear this information is something they would like access to, even if it did not result in a business startup, it would be helpful to know.

**This tells us...interest in Social Enterprise is much greater than the information available.**

Our interviewees showed a keen interest in learning more about Social Enterprise and having the choice in the future of potentially starting one, even if they had mixed views about starting up their own. Within the space of our hour-long interviews, their knowledge and interest in Social Entrepreneurship grew, which is indicative of how beneficial more education on social enterprise could be to this target group.

One man described Social Entrepreneurship as a 'win-win situation' but throughout our interviews it became apparent that starting a Social Enterprise was thought of as a dream or as aspirational, instead of a tangible goal. Our participants who were interested in Social Entrepreneurship all believed that if "given the chance [they] could make a huge difference to [their] community," even if there were concerns about the viability or likelihood of this 'chance.'

**This tells us...the young men feel as though there is a clear lack of support in this area.**

Both the questionnaire results and interviews showed a conclusive lack of information and support for getting into Social Entrepreneurship. None of our interviewees could name a person or website that already catered to this lack of information but believed a resource like that would be beneficial. Our participants were keen to learn more about Social Entrepreneurship and wanted to access this information in a number of ways, such as short courses, online information, flyers and resources in community locations.

Beyond information and learning about Social Entrepreneurship, *our participants identified several* other areas that they believed would be needed to start a Social Enterprise but not something readily available to them.

—> For some, time in prison resulted in a **decrease in confidence and feelings of isolation from their community**. It was important for these individuals to have opportunities to build their confidence back up, as well as to get reassurance and belief from those around them that they were doing well.

—> For others, interpersonal skills were not a cause for concern. **Managerial skills and accounting** were also identified as suggested areas of support, as most of our respondents had not held managerial responsibilities before. Some had learnt about accounting and found these skills to be useful and transferable.

—> All interviewees were keen for some form of **mentorship** to support them throughout their Social Enterprise journeys. Our interviewees were also keen to become mentors themselves in the future and for there to be more opportunities to share knowledge in more communal ways that do not resemble the hierarchies found in traditional classroom settings.

—> **Financial support** was also a key concern. Of the few reasons against starting up a Social Enterprise, most are linked to 'pay, risk and security'. Our participants were concerned about having enough money to open a business and then having enough to sustain it as well. All of our interviewees feel that financial stability is a major barrier to starting and maintaining a business. This was true for the money they believed they would need to start a business, as well as to keep the business afloat and ensure employee wellbeing was prioritised. Money was also what determined or prohibited them from investing more time and effort into Social Entrepreneurship. Our interviewees all want to be self-employed at some point but feel that working for other people provided stability and income that was guaranteed and steady. This was particularly important for our participants who spoke about having additional responsibilities and needing to support their families as well as themselves.

### **With all of this in mind, is there a potential for Social Entrepreneurship opportunities to act as a viable avenue for successful social reintegration?**

Not all of our participants wanted to speak about their time in prison in great detail, but of those who did, they were keen to work with young people in their local communities, as well as other Black men. The men we spoke to valued community integration and support, especially as their time in prison had physically removed them from their communities, which is often difficult to recover from. Many of them would like to provide some sort of physical space with an influential presence within the community.

# CALLS TO ACTION



Our participants shed light on how they could have been engaged with Social Entrepreneurship at different stages during their time in prison. Based on our key insights, we have shaped our calls to actions into phases to reflect significant points where service users in the criminal justice system can engage with support and access to Social Entrepreneurship.



## Introduce Phase

The 'Introduce Phase' would be the first opportunity to officially introduce service users to the existing relationship between Social Enterprises and the UK criminal justice system, by incorporating entrepreneurship through the existing learning curriculum provided in prisons. This could be embedded as an optional course within Vocational and Technical Education or Progression and Career Pathways provisions (Novus, 2022). As we are aware that a learning curriculum is a good opportunity to introduce practical learning through entrepreneurial activities.

- **Incorporating entrepreneurship programmes into the UK prison learning curriculum**

From our research, it is evident that during their time in prison our participants participated in a range of educational and vocational programmes to integrate them back into the workforce. In fact for many of our participants, these course offerings were at a significantly lower level than their academic credentials, with a quarter of our survey participants already having undergraduate degrees and just under half having A-levels. This is an interesting finding as society often adopts Charles Murrays' dated theory of the "underclass" in that criminal culture has a direct link to poverty, family structures and lack of education (Murray, 2013).

The first call to action focuses on how we can develop and enhance the current vocational learning as a way to introduce Social Entrepreneurship to current prison residents. Thus:

- Dedicated funding for programmes focussed on developing key entrepreneurial skills for prison residents.
- Embedding Social Entrepreneurship learning alongside current vocational programmes and short courses to introduce prison residents to Social Entrepreneurship in a practical way.
- Entrepreneurship programmes should be co-designed and facilitated by relatable role models who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- Increase referrals from the wider UK criminal justice system, to Social Entrepreneurship organisations.

Our initial research found that Social Enterprise programmes already exist, like the ones mentioned in our Literature Review Findings section. However, our participants had very little knowledge of what was out there before entering prison. Our participants were interested in being self employed and in giving back to their communities, so the choice to learn about Social Entrepreneurship whilst in prison is likely to have made a difference.

- In addition to the probation service, police and courts should also be able to suggest such programmes, particularly if they have the power to divert people away from prison.

## Initiate Phase

The 'Initiate Phase' of our calls to action will focus on supplementing the theoretical knowledge taught in the 'Introduce Phase' by introducing mentoring relationships and the influence of positive role models.

- **Invest in mentorship programmes for young men to receive direct knowledge about how to develop entrepreneurial skills**

The transfer of relatable knowledge for young men in the criminal justice system is mainly passed on through personal relationships. Investing in mentorship programmes could potentially enhance the learnings of the first call to action and ensure that prison residents had an opportunity to discuss their learnings in a personal setting.

- Facilitate mentoring programmes where young men are matched with a mentor with relatable experience who can support them with their learning on a entrepreneurial programme.
- Provide training opportunities for young men in the criminal justice system with business coaching and training of soft skills needed to run a successful business.
- Create an internal campaign with case studies showcasing ex-prison residents who have positively contributed to their society using their entrepreneurial skills.

## Invest Phase

The 'Invest Phase' of the calls to actions focuses on creating an environment to capture and practice the knowledge learnt from the previous phases in a real life context. Our participants highlighted a number of areas where they would require support in order to set up their own business or engage with a Social Enterprise. Therefore we believe it is important to provide them with a safe learning space to test their knowledge whilst building key soft skills needed through the below call to actions.

- Regional/national start-up competitions and business showcase in prisons.
- Creating team building activities in the form of a competition or showcase for prison residents to implement the skills learnt through the short courses and mentoring relationship.
- A positive reward for prison residents participating in the programme and who come up with a solution which will have a sustainable contribution to society.
- Advertising case studies from the competition through internal prison media channels in prisons to encourage prison residents to develop the skills learnt outside of courses and mentoring relationships.

# FINAL REFLECTIONS





We started this project to provide a safe space for young Black ex-prison residents to share what they felt they needed to keep them on a law abiding path. With backgrounds in working with marginalised individuals and passion for building the communities we live in, we found a way to bring this together through Social Enterprise.

We have found that Social Enterprise appears to be an untapped area that could be greatly beneficial for our target group and the communities they belong to. As a whole, the perception of starting a business is that it is risky and only possible for those with money and access. The risk to reward ratio is unreliable and for some the stability of working for an established business/employer is a much safer option. For many, the barriers to achieving a Social Enterprise existed before entering the criminal justice system but were undoubtedly made worse with the stigma and negative association that comes with having a criminal record.

Our recommendations have been solely centred around the voices of the young Black men that we spoke to. They want this second chance to do right by the community that they are returning to. Society already invests a great deal in punishing the wrong doings of people through the penal system. Why not redirect some of these funds to people who want to take more ownership in their personal and financial development whilst giving back to society?



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