



**O**nce released into the community, many former prisoners reoffend and find themselves back in prison again, often only months later. The picture is particularly grim for young people. However, a forward-thinking rail industry initiative is tackling the problem head on.

Parc prison in Bridgend, South Wales, is little different from many others around the country. Operated by G4S, and the only privately operated prison in Wales, HM Prison Parc is a Category B men's prison and young-offenders institution. Built by Costain at a cost of £82 million, it was opened in 1997 and has a capacity of 1,336, although the actual number at any one time fluctuates. Many are serving sentences of 10 years or more.

That means that some 100 former prisoners are released back into the community every month. Many will have no jobs to go to. Nationally, 18.5 per cent of released prisoners reoffend within one year, over 40 per cent of those within three months of release. For youths, the figure is much higher at 29.7 per cent within one year.

The prisons are well aware of the problem. Parc Prison offers inmates vocational courses on motor mechanics, carpentry and painting and decorating. Prisoners can attain an NVQ in performing manufacturing operations at levels 1 & 2 and they can also work towards health & safety qualifications through the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

But the lack of opportunities for prisoners after release is always on prison management's mind.

## HOW ABOUT RAIL?

Heidi Crowther-Gjuv is responsible for Parc Prison's rehabilitation programmes. She discussed her problem with her husband - Dave Crowther - who runs Safety-Counts, a training company that specialises in safety training to NPTC (National Proficiency Tests Council - now part of City & Guilds) and CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) standards.

But a major part of the work that Safety-Counts does is in rail, delivering personal track safety (PTS), induction, lookout, site warden and controller of site safety courses.

The rail industry has a good record of being open to people from diverse backgrounds, including ex-offenders. So, Dave started wondering how prisoners, many of whom would be coming to the end of long sentences, could undergo rail training in a secure environment. It would need a dedicated training facility.

## LOCATING MATERIALS

This is where fate played a hand. Dave had a chance meeting with Jason Weetman, a materials recovery specialist at Network Rail Route Services' Westbury materials handling and recycling centre near Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

Dave explained to Jason that his discussions with senior officers at the prison had concluded that they could address the rail industry's challenges of an ageing workforce and skills shortage by training inmates that would soon be released. But



# TACKLING REOFFENDING

## TRAINING PRISONERS FOR A CAREER IN RAIL HELPS THEM BECOME PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY UPON RELEASE

they would need track materials to train them on safety and maintenance activities and provide an understanding of the railway.

Jason was impressed by the plans and the opportunity it would give to both the prisoners and to the railway at large. He took the idea back to base and discussed them with colleagues Victoria Patterson, materials recovery business support specialist, and Carly Keen in supply chain business support.

They could fulfil about 60 per cent of Dave's material wish-list from Westbury stock. To complete the list, several of Jason's customers and colleagues helped find the rest. A supplier - Roger Jackson Haulage - agreed to transport the materials to Parc Prison.

Dave and his co-director, John Lloyd, then worked with the prison authorities to build up the training facility. A secure rectangular space was identified between a high wall and a security fence and the facility would be built there.

The materials arranged by Jason, Victoria and Carly duly arrived from Westbury and were lifted over the outer fence. Staff from Safety-Counts, and some prisoners, then built up the facility.

Heidi Crowther-Gjuv, whose conversation with her husband started the whole process, was truly appreciative. "As a minimum, it costs up to £70,000 per year to keep someone in prison. If this project prevents just one person



At the opening of Parc Junction, From left: Richard Parry, project interface co-ordinator, Network Rail Route Services; Sian Hibbs, director of strategic support, administration & assurance for HM Prison & Probation Service; Janet Wallsgrove, director of HMP & YOI Parc; Heidi Crowther-Gjuv, senior regimes manager, HMP & YOI Parc; Scott Threadgold, head of regimes, HMP & YOI Parc; Jason Weetman, materials recovery specialist, Network Rail Route Services; Representative from the Welsh Government; Victoria Patterson, business support specialist, materials recovery, Network Rail Route Services.

from re-offending, then gifting these materials - which carry a value of £6,000 - will prove priceless.

"Without Jason's tenacious chasing up with the gifting process and locating the components, then it is likely that this project may never have progressed. The project has been very collaborative, and this is what has helped to get it off the ground."

The success of this project won Jason a 'Highly Commended' in the Charity category at the 2019 RailStaff Awards.

### THE BENEFITS OF TRAINING

Once the new facility, now named Parc Junction, was finished, Dave and John could prepare for the first course. The prison team selected likely candidates, based on behaviour, anticipated release date and aptitude. The prison's own print room, staffed by inmates, even overprinted the protective clothing that Safety-Counts provided.

The course was accredited by NSAR (National Skills Academy Rail) in September 2019 and is therefore classed »»

Jason Weetman (centre) speaks with two of the prisoners on the first course.



as industry-ready training. Contingent labour specialist NGage Group came on board to act as sponsor for the trainees, all of whom underwent a standard rail-industry drugs and alcohol test and medical examination. There were no shortcuts.

One area that was a slight challenge was the e-learning element. Prisons have, understandably, very secure firewalls, so Safety-Counts had to work with staff to make sure that trainees could access the required material.

The end result was a successful first course with some 12 candidates undergoing a 10-week course that covered:

- First Aid at Work (three days);
- OLEC 1 for overhead line construction sites;
- PTS and PTS AC (for overhead lines);
- DC Conductor Rails;
- ICI - Industries Common Induction;
- Track Induction;
- Manual Handling;
- Fire Awareness;
- COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health);
- Opportunity to gain a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card.

On release, NGage guaranteed a work placement to all those that passed the course and had demonstrated the correct work ethic.

Naturally, how these first few graduates get on will be closely monitored. The whole idea of the programme is to help released prisoners integrate back into society and prevent reoffending.

As an extra carrot, Dave Crowther has offered graduates who stick to the programme and do well a complimentary lookout/site warden course, to help them progress in their new careers.

NSAR chief Executive Neil Robertson said: "It is marvellous to see what the team at Parc Prison, Safety-Counts and Network Rail has achieved.

"The rail industry is a very non-judgemental employer. We have worked with various

groups in the past, taking on former servicemen and women, ex-miners and even released offenders on several occasions.

"But to have this dedicated rail training facility set up inside a prison is a great idea and I thoroughly congratulate all those involved."

The team is planning to run four courses each year, preparing 48 prisoners for a new career in rail. The second course starts shortly. ●



## PRISONER REACTIONS:

O: "It's the best thing that has ever happened to me. I would have never been able to complete this on the outside, it's given me a drive to better myself and to find employment."

R: "Life changing - it's given me opportunities that would have never existed before. I 100% will be looking at a rail career on release and am very thankful for this opportunity."

C: "This has been an excellent opportunity that will stop me from reoffending. I appreciate that I have been able to complete the course and it has given me something to look forward to rather than going back outside and behaving the same."

J: "Looking forward to making contact with training providers on the outside to start a new job. I would never have had the opportunity to complete this if Parc had not offered the course to me."

H: "This will stop me from reoffending, it's as simple as that. I would never have had the chance to complete this on the outside. It has given me something to look forward to rather than being in the same situation all the time."