

## Good practice: Developing social skills to improve work preparedness of prisoners

21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill connected: Social skills and problem solving skills.

Give an explanation of how this good practice works. Examples from websites, videos or other media are necessary.

The purpose of serving prison sentence is re-socialization, rehabilitation and reintegration of the convicted persons in the community. They are expected to develop pro-social attitudes and positive system of values, to strengthen their social, communication and practical life skills so that they can successfully deal with the challenges that life brings. Also, it is expected to develop stable communication and relationships within the family, work environment and other settings.

Considering that convicted persons are a heterogeneous population that differs according to certain personal characteristics: education, professional classifications, mental abilities, work history, history of addictions, social status, degree of danger and risk to security, etc., they also have different needs. Thus, based on previous assessment of their individual characteristics and needs, an individual approach within the inmate's rehabilitation treatment is required.

However, general statistics data show that the majority of inmates are a vulnerable category who often suffer from mental illnesses, have low job classifications, some of them don't have any working experience, have a low educational level, suffer from addictions, trauma and childhood abuse, grew up in poverty and are often socially excluded persons who did not actively participate in social, cultural and economic life. Some of them grew up in foster care institutions or in foster families. Therefore, they have poor social capital, which implies individual and potential sources and capacities (social skills, knowledge, education, social connections, vocational skills, work employability) that can help them to be successfully reintegrated into community after release. In addition, most of them are not competitive in the labour market; do not have adequate work experience, employability skills, or appropriate professional qualifications.

Based on those circumstances, one of the priorities within the process of re-socialization and rehabilitation is to gain appropriate skills to increase the opportunities for employment, to improve the social and employability skills of inmates in order to strengthen their work preparedness after release. And being prepared for employment consists of many elements. For inmates, the prison staffs need to meet their rehabilitative needs. Once these needs are met, their requirements for work preparedness align with those of any other person competing in the labour market. Having social skills that include how to interact with others, how to solve the problems, and how to cope with anger and others can enable successful integration into a workplace. Those are communication skills, self management, teamwork, cooperation, self-control, problem solving, positive attitude, willingness to learn, thinking (decision-making) skills, conflict management. Those individual features are necessary conditions and requests for both, finding and keeping a job, which are required by every employer. In order to develop and improve the above outlined social skills of the inmates, there are several good models/programs that address some of them and include creative and innovative means aimed to their development and acquisition in a way which will benefit inmates after release from prison.

One of them is the **Programme for violent offenders** within the project "Strengthening the protection of the rights of sentenced persons" 2018, drafted by a working group composed of representatives of the North Macedonian Directorate for execution of sanctions and prison staff from the national penitentiary system. Although, it is intended for violent

offenders, and in general encompasses acquisition of more social skills, still it can be applied to all inmates in need to improve certain social skills that will improve their employability.

The programme contains learning technique and methods for teaching several social skills to violent prisoners. Those are:

- avoiding fights and reaction to failure,
- active listening and understanding someone else's feelings,
- recognising somebody else's anger and dealing with it,
- Anger control and problem solving skills.

The aim of the program is the prisoners to understand the importance of the skill of avoiding fights and the reaction to failure and to learn how to cope with violence. In term of communication skills, the program aims to teach prisoners to understand the importance of active listening in communication with others, as well as the importance of understanding someone else's feelings. In addition, the prisoners need to recognise own anger and somebody else's anger and to be able to cope with it. In that context the program, strive to teach offenders about the ABCs model of anger (Antecedent – Behaviour - Consequence).

The program also, aim to learn prisoners to determine a causal way of thinking and acting, to understand self-assessment with the purpose of supporting positive reactions and its benefits, to develop self-confidence and a better image of oneself and to be able to give options of reactions through which they can calm down and manage anger.

Besides, the program covers enhancing problem solving skills that means prisoners to understand that their behaviour can serve as a trigger for anger in others, to change their provocative behaviour with another form of behaviour and to understand all anger control techniques. For that purpose, inmates need to know how to describe problematic situations objectively and to identify how their risky reactions, thoughts and feelings further aggravate the problem (The program is attached to this template).

In addition to this program, there are several good exercises aimed to develop social skills to improve work preparedness of prisoners. Those are: (1) conflict styles and (2) listening skills (The exercises are attached to this template)

#### **Other useful videos and resources:**

- **Doing the Job: Basic Job Skills (interpersonal skills) (30 min)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edUoXRk6ZLk>

An employee's best qualities may have little to do with technical or clerical issues. Often, it is a professional attitude that makes a worker valuable—an array of personal strengths that enable her or him to accomplish goals, get along with colleagues, and rise through the ranks. This video brings those all-too-elusive aspects of job success into focus, exploring professional behaviour, ethics, communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving, organization, and information management. Discussions focus on collaboration, taking initiative, and office etiquette; the hazards of procrastination, dishonesty, and unethical actions; the ability to take and give constructive criticism; the four C's of good writing (be clear, concise, compelling, and correct); effective uses for technology in completing projects and presenting work.

- **Effective Communication Skills in the Workplace/Communication at Work**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGHBq5OEsBM>

- **Problem Solving in the Workplace**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehRNriENFic>

In this video, five steps to problem-solving are investigated: define the problem, brainstorm solutions, make plans and evaluate, implement the plan and re-evaluate to determine how well the plan is working.

- **5 Types of Conflict in the Workplace and How To Handle Them**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7-bbd1F9bk>

**Explain how this good practice helps solve problems/stimulates social vocational skills in your country. If possible, provide data of how successful the good practice is.**

Developing social skills related to improving negative behaviour, active listening and understanding someone else's feelings, recognising somebody else's anger and dealing with it, as well as anger control and problem solving skills will provide adult prisoners with employability pathways which will support their successful re-integration into the community.

The program for violent offenders target factors known to be directly related to the reasons for offending, including antisocial attitudes, anger, low self-control. Therefore, acquisitions of social skills, which target cognitive and behavioural capacities of inmates, which are related to their offending, contribute to decrease of recidivism and increase the possibility for employment. For example, problem-solving skills will provide inmates with skills to identify and assess options before making a decision, to recognize problems and to think about consequences before they act. Conflict management skills (recognising somebody else's anger and dealing with it or avoiding conflicts can resolve tension in interpersonal and intergroup differences. Inmates can gain ability to deal with problematic situations without resorting to confrontation, but seeking shared and shareable solutions.

In that context, this kind of training for adult prisoners and offenders can make a significant difference to successful post-offending employment outcomes and thus reduce the likelihood of re-offending. In addition, this approach will increase the work preparedness of inmates that will lead to more finding and keeping jobs.

Another benefits include:

- Creating strong connections between social skills training activities in prison and reintegration opportunities in the community.
- Giving inmates more confidence in their ability to succeed at work, especially if they haven't had one before, or have been in prison for a long time.
- Increasing conversations in prison about employability skills.

This practice was piloted 2 days a week for 2.5 months in one of the Macedonian prisons in 2018 with group of 10 prisoners. Although the improvement of the inmate's attitudes was recognised, it requires longer period of observation to determine the successfulness of the program.

**Explain in one or two sentences how this good practice matches with the connected 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill.**

Inmates, as vulnerable category especially violent offenders, due to their poor socialisation process through their life path lack basic social skills related to communication, self-esteem, developing healthy relationships and in general interacting with the community harmoniously. The proposed practice is based on certain social skill trainings, (as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill), aimed to help inmates to make good choices in thinking and behaviour, resulting in social competence.

Supporting documents attached:

- Best practice 3, Programme for violent offenders pdf
- Best practice 3. Exercises Conflict styles and Listening skills
- Pictures

