

Written evidence submitted by LandWorks

1. Introduction

We very much welcome the call for submissions to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into 'Improving Resettlement Support for Prison Leavers'. The National Audit Office (NAO) report (2023) makes clear that there has been a significant deterioration in the quality of resettlement services provided by HMPPS. Our response to this inquiry draws on our experience of operating a successful rehabilitation and resettlement project since 2013 and attempts to address the question of why our programme has proved to be so successful from the viewpoint of our service users. We conclude by pointing out how our project, and others like us, could be further supported and ways forward to improve the provision of resettlement support for prison leavers. We would be delighted to welcome Ministers and/or officials to visit LandWorks as part of the ongoing inquiry into how resettlement support could be improved for prison leavers.

2. Description of the project

2.1 LandWorks was first established in 2013 and became an independent registered charity (CIO) in March 2016. It works with men and women based in the community, either on licence following release from local prisons, or serving community sentences, and men on day release from a local prison (currently suspended due to restrictions arising from the Covid 19 pandemic) to support their rehabilitation and resettlement back into the local community. Hence our main sources of referral are the prison and probation services.

2.2 At the heart of the project is a vision to provide a safe, non-judgemental environment where former offenders can gain the employability and social skills that will enable them to develop a crime free identity and to rebuild their lives. This vision is informed by research on desistance (the term used by criminologists to describe and explain the challenges that offenders face and the processes that they navigate as they make the decision to cease offending) and a 'theory of change' which can be viewed [here](#).

2.3 Our delivery model uses the structure of a 'working day' to develop the vocational and social skills needed to support change and find employment. While on placement the Trainees participate in three enterprises - a sustainably operated market garden, a wood workshop and pottery. They are also involved in site maintenance and small building projects. Eating and cooking together at lunchtime

using our own homegrown produce provide further opportunities for service users to feel a sense of belonging and fine tune their social skills. Alongside this core working day, LandWorks provides counselling and practical resettlement support.

2.4 Since the project started in 2013 ([10th anniversary this year](#)), we have provided 194 placements. In 2021 LandWorks produced a film entitled 'Finishing Time and Moving On: Life After Punishment'. The film, available [here](#), highlights the benefits for Trainees currently undergoing the LandWorks programme and the support offered to Graduates who have finished their placements.

2.5 We have an exemplary track record of reducing reoffending. Currently the one-year reoffending rate for Trainees following their placement at LandWorks stands at 5.2%. Desistance research show that having a job is a key to successful resettlement outcomes. The success of our training programme is evidenced by our employment rate for economically active Graduates which in March 2023 was 94 %.

3. Engaging with service users and giving them a voice

3.1 Unlike many statutory resettlement agencies, LandWorks relies on the feedback and lived experience of service users to develop and adapt its programme. Essential to this process are the PeN (Photographic Electronic Narrative) research interviews which give service users the opportunity to share the highs and lows of their resettlement journeys and evaluate how well LandWorks has responded. These interviews are then turned into anonymous blog posts and photographs which are shared with supporters and the wider community, and which can be viewed [here](#).

3.2 However the PeN interviews serve another important function. Landworks is committed to evaluating its work and has invested in an ongoing contract with the University of Plymouth to undertake an annual evaluation. The PeN interviews form a crucial component of this evaluation by enabling us to understand from the standpoint of Trainees and Graduates what works best so that we can improve our programme to support successful resettlement. Here is the link to the 'Evaluation Report 2022'.

3.3 The successful impact of the LandWorks programme is clearly illustrated by the story of Tony (a Trainee from last year's cohort), who arrived at LandWorks broken with low self-esteem, lacking in confidence and a heavy drinker. By the end of his placement his drinking was under control, his vocational skills had improved, he had stable accommodation and had clear prospects of employment. Overall, his spell at LandWorks had given him the self-confidence and social capital to sustain his journey away for crime. Tony explains how he turned his life around in a recent PeN project [blog](#).

4. What do our service users tell us about why LandWorks is so successful as a resettlement agency?

4.1 From conversations with our Trainees and Graduates we know that they have experienced severely disadvantaged, chaotic, and unstable lives, resulting in multiple needs which are closely associated with their offending behaviour. Statutory services are failing to respond adequately, too often under-resourced and disjointed, as evidenced by continuously high reoffending rates. In response, LandWorks has developed a holistic service that meets the needs of service users by combining real work experience and training alongside comprehensive resettlement support in a highly nurturing environment.

4.2 Trainees and Graduates identified one of the core 'mechanisms of change' as the focus on practical and outdoor work experience which provided the opportunity not only to improve their employability but also to reignite the social skills which have often been destroyed through the stigma and discrimination they have been exposed to in the criminal justice system. Time spent making, growing, and selling in the market garden, wood workshops or pottery was seen to offer them an 'oasis of calm' and stability where their self-confidence, feelings of self-worth, sense of achievement and resilience to change could be nurtured and rebuilt.

4.3 Another core feature of the LandWorks programme valued by service users is our 'resettlement hub' of support which we have been steadily strengthening and building over the last 5 years in collaboration with specialist mental health, social welfare, benefits, housing, employment and drug and alcohol agencies. Most of this support is now provided internally by our newly appointed Resettlement Manager. However, external agencies continue to deliver specialist sessions on-site to complement the in-house help and create a comprehensive 'wraparound' resettlement hub. In addition, many of the people we work with are suffering from the effects of complex trauma, so we also provide individual counselling on-site delivered by a qualified psychotherapist.

4.4 Our Trainees and Graduates tell us that desistance from offending can be a long and uneven journey. Therefore, LandWorks stresses the importance of remaining in contact with Trainees after placement by providing on-going, tapered support. This is tailored to individual needs and can range from checking-in and being a listening ear, through to providing advice and signposting, accessing our resettlement services and, at points of crisis, can even lead to return placements. In the last year 124 (out of a total of 175) Graduates accessed this type of support and guidance. In 2021 a 'zine' was produced which illustrates the importance of ongoing support to Trainees once they 'graduate' from the LandWorks programme. Here is the link to the 'zine': https://issuu.com/fotonowpublishing/docs/pen_project_issuu

4.5 Max, one of the Trainees from our last year's cohort, succinctly sums up the core difference between LandWorks and prison:

'It helps in a big way... You can lose your confidence in prison. You don't think you could work again...here, you've got people as a backup, a bit of help. You're not on your own...it's hard to take help, especially as a male...it gives you a bit of value and self-worth. You come out of prison, and you've got none. You think you're unemployable. You're spoken to like shit in prison. You're given a number. You

have your name taken off you. That's not good for the psyche, is it? ... When you're here its sanctuary because you're just out the way of all the crap...it gives you a chance to breath.'

5. Lessons learnt and how can resettlement agencies like LandWorks be supported to be more sustainable?

5.1 LandWorks is a charity which relies on external funding to run its programme which for our Trainees and Graduates is life changing in their journey away from crime. Securing regular funding to guarantee the sustainability of the project can often be a struggle. This could be eased through the provision of more stable government funding outlets under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice.

5.2 Recently the Ministry of Justice announced the 'One HMPPS' policy agenda (<https://www.russellwebster.com/one-hmpps/>) which aims to strengthen the links between the prison and probation services and develop more innovative, regional working relationships with third sector agencies. The thinking behind this initiative is to ensure a more joined up and coordinated approach to offender rehabilitation and resettlement. LandWorks totally supports this agenda and would be very interested in engaging with our partners in the probation and prison services to make it happen in the Southwest.

5.3 LandWorks' success story is based on the understanding that in order to truly support people to change their lives and to effectively enter and maintain employment, there needs to be holistic and sustained support, built on trusting relationships and delivered in a highly accessible way. While we very much welcome a focus on improving the provision of services while people are in prison, our experience is that for many of the most challenging and vulnerable people, it is critical that holistic support is delivered on release. This is especially the case with short prison sentences when only so much can be done inside.

However, the current support on release is wholly inadequate as evidenced by the NAO report (2023) - probation caseloads remain unsustainably high and the support that is available is often disjointed and doesn't work with the reality of people's lives - multiple appointments in multiple locations are a real barrier to engagement.

We believe that LandWorks and the other charities in the sector that are providing comprehensive models of support have much expertise to offer in considering how to improve resettlement support for prison leavers. Although the models vary, the core elements – holistic, relationship-based, through-the-gate, sustained support – appear to be working and can be the key to turning around the lives of prison leavers and preparing them for employment.

Over the last few years, we at Landworks have put together a proposal, based on our delivery model, for '*Prison Leaver Centres*'. These would combine work-experience and skills development with a range of other practical and personal support, all on one site. Like LandWorks they could be accessed both via ROTL and following release from custody, with a focus on stabilising people's lives and

preparing them for employment. We would be happy to further elaborate on this proposal with the Committee.

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