



Press Release: Highland Community Justice Partnership

Employers gather to discuss giving people a second chance by considering offering them a job

Employers met last week (Thursday 7 Nov) to hear how their “Courage of Conviction” can help give someone a second chance in life.

The Highland Community Justice Partnership (CJP) hosted an evening of speakers and conversation, for employers and businesses in the Highlands, around the idea of supporting people in our communities who have offended to make changes in their own lives. The Inverness Chamber of Commerce and Skills Development Scotland were also backing the event.

The event primarily focused on the difficulties and barriers surrounding those who have convictions and lived experience gaining employment. Speakers from as far afield as Belfast, Manchester and Glasgow talked about how gaining employment can be a turning point in someone’s life.

“I’d be mad to turn away profit because I don’t want to employ someone who happens to have been to prison for a bit of their life”, says James Timpson, chief executive of Timpson Ltd, who takes a very business approach to the recruitment of offenders. Last week, in Inverness, Darren Burns, National Recruitment Ambassador at Timpson Ltd, spoke about the successful employment scheme, Timpson Ltd, run with people who have committed an offence, in their experience these people tend to be more loyal to the company because they have been given an opportunity.

The event provided businesses with information on how barriers can be overcome, how they can assist in providing opportunities for those people who are disadvantaged and what assistance is available to them to help provide such opportunities.

A series of highly regarded speakers introduced the evening including Karyn McCluskey, Chief Executive, Community Justice Scotland who said: “Employment has a halo effect on a family. It can transform lives, not just by putting food on the table but by instilling pride, a sense of achievement and giving hope for a better future.

Events like Courage of our Convictions fill an important role in helping employers to recruit people with an offending past and in promoting the benefits – for the employee and the employer.”

The Chair of the Highland Community Justice Partnership, Group Commander Niall MacLennan from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service said: “The Courage of Our Convictions seminar was a hugely positive event for the Highlands. We were very fortunate to have four guest speakers who are all actively involved in promoting, supporting and employing people with offending backgrounds.

“Their presentations were hugely motivational and inspiring and highlighted the benefits and positive outcomes that are brought to individuals, communities and to employers through the employment of people with an offending history. Highland Community Justice Partnership are keen to use the foundations laid down at this event and will continue to look at ways to promote and support the employment of those with offending backgrounds in the Highland area.”

James Docherty, a person who has previously been involved with the criminal justice system, who now works with the Violence Reduction Unit provided a powerful and valuable insight into the barriers that can be so difficult to overcome and how he personally overcame them. He said: “A job meets four basic human needs for health and wellbeing to take place: purpose, meaning, contribution and responsibility. It also provides a new environment and relationships, which are vital. Employers, really can be part of building safer and more connected communities by employing people furthest from the job market.”

The final speaker of the event was Gerry Ford, Director at Mugshots, a prison based printing enterprise in Northern Ireland, which aims to break the reoffending cycle by equipping young offenders with the skills, support resources, network, attitude and ethics to compete more effectively for employment or to start their own micro enterprise.

One of the priorities within the Community Justice Plan 2018-21 is Employment and Employability. As part of the work around this priority, the Community Justice Partnership recognises that employment is a key factor in assisting with the reduction in offending and reoffending.

In the new year, there will be follow-up events aimed at businesses and employers in the Highlands.

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The Highland Community Justice Partnership consists of members of the following organisations: The Highland Council, Criminal Justice social work, Police Scotland, Scottish Prisons Service, Crown Office and Prosecution Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue, NHS Highland, Skills Development Scotland, Victim Support Scotland, Scottish Courts Service and the Highland Third Sector Interface. The role of the partnership is to work together to help prevent offending and reduce reoffending.