

# young british muslim ex-offenders and resettlement needs

## Improving resettlement service provision for young Muslim ex-offenders

# Summary

Research report by the Muslim Youth Helpline

February 2011



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## Recommendations - All service providers

### **Continued Support & Development**

To help towards reducing the re-offending rate and to address social and economical problems that may be linked to an individual's offending; Service providers should develop the capacity and flexibility within their programmes to allow ex-offenders to return to the organisation or programme for additional and continued support, particularly around accommodation and substance abuse rehabilitation. Developing flexibility within their programmes would mean that service providers are able to address any resettlement problems ex-offenders are facing even after having been signposted to a difference service or enrolled onto a different programme.

### **Recognising Diversity**

It is important that providers understand the considerable diversity within the Muslim prisoner population. This covers ethnic group, nationality and theology but most importantly, gender. Services need to be appropriated to meet the needs of local female ex-offenders and these differ quite considerably from those of male ex-offenders. Staff members need to be trained to deliver a service that is both faith and culturally sensitive to be able to have the cultural competency and an understanding of Islam to be able to work with Muslim ex-offenders effectively.

### **Increased joint planning**

Increased joint planning needs to take place between the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector to facilitate enhanced consultation processes and procedures. This includes offering voluntary and community organisations the support to build the capacity required to engage in the planning and delivery of service to contribute towards reducing re-offending. This consultative process would facilitate the availability of grants and other means of funding to increase the capacity of services and would also allow the voluntary and community sector to inform the statutory sector of the relevant issues that hinder the resettlement process, thereby contributing towards preventing re-offending.

### **Wider Muslim Community Support**

Ex-offenders and service providers spoke at length about the role the wider Muslim community plays in contributing to or hindering the resettlement process. Muslim communities were described as being quick to judge those that had gone through the criminal justice system even though they may not have been convicted. Ex-offenders have expressed that support from the community, including their local mosque and Imam, would go a long way in ensuring ex-offenders felt welcomed and supported, not ostracized, as they attempted to reintegrate into society. Mosque and community leaders need to play a larger role in educating the wider community about the struggles that ex-offenders face and encourage members of the wider community to not marginalize these individuals.

## Recommendations - Resettlement Services

Some types of resettlement services were reiterated frequently in interviews as being more important than others. These services would cater to the immediate needs of ex-offenders upon release from prison and will contribute to preventing them from re-offending shortly after release:

### **Accommodation**

Without secure, appropriate accommodation, ex-offenders are at a higher risk of re-offending and no permanent address makes it difficult for them to apply for jobs, open a bank account, or register with a GP. Therefore, more needs to be done on the part of statutory and voluntary and community services, to support ex-offenders with finding a place to stay. Local authority housing departments should also be integrally involved with advising and facilitating housing of ex-offenders even before they leave prison, to make their transition back into society as smooth as possible.

### **Employment**

A majority of the ex-offenders we spoke to said they are finding it increasingly difficult to find employment. They believe this is due to having to complete the criminal record disclosure on most job applications, following which, despite being told that they will not be discriminated against because of prior convictions, they are refused a job. On the other hand, when they are approached by agencies with information on potential jobs, they find that the work is not in line with their faith or cultural values and either have to turn the job down or forsake their values and belief system. Statutory and voluntary and community services, where appropriate, should encourage businesses and draw on existing partnerships to offer work experience and employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

## Education

Few educational projects work with ex-offenders to encourage them to take up education and enabling them to focus on their academic and skills development at a low cost or free of charge. Projects such as those provided by the Foundation Training Company, should be used as models upon which service providers can draw upon the relevant training, vocational qualifications, and support with employment that ex-offenders need. Successful projects and programmes should enable ex-offenders that are unable to work or find employment to receive an education and use the skills and knowledge obtained to secure employment in the future.

This summary presents the findings and recommendations arising from research carried out with offenders, ex-offenders and service providers. A quantitative analysis was conducted with questionnaires being distributed to offenders in prisons across England and a qualitative data was collected and analysed following interviews held with service providers and ex-offenders and a focus group held with ex-offenders. Some of the main themes and insights garnered from this analysis are outlined here:

- Lack of resources - Lack of resources to be able to meet client's needs, particularly female ex-offenders who have a range of complex needs and often find reintegrating into the community much harder than male ex-offenders. Female ex-offenders are also more vulnerable, and this compounds the problem further.
- Staff Training - Staff members need to be trained to deliver a service that is both faith and culturally sensitive to be able to have the cultural competency and an understanding of Islam to be able to work with Muslim ex-offenders effectively. Another alternative to this would be to appoint staff members that have some knowledge and understanding of Islam to be able to identify with the background from which an ex-offender presents him/herself.
- Accessibility & Knowledge of Resettlement Services – One-stop shops that cater for individual offenders resettlement needs in one place would benefit offenders greatly. Ex-offenders also need to be provided with up to date information on resettlement services in their area and the standard of resettlement advice and support needs to be improved.

### Excerpts from the report:

“For those for whom faith is valued, faith is all encompassing. When looking to create treatment plans and support plans as well as looking at the impact on mental, emotional and physical health, consider how it will impact their faith. Not acknowledging their faith is in a way discriminatory and will put up a barrier to engaging with Muslims.”

(Frontline Resettlement Worker, Housing provider)

“We tend to find that women see the benefit of engaging within a service; one that can help with drug and alcohol abuse with medication. They may not have been ready to address their problem initially but it has a significant impact on their lifestyle. Our clients are also able to self-refer so we recognise the sensitivities around this.”

(Support Worker, Women's Service)

“Some of them give you information and some of them don't. What it is is they are looking for you not to reoffend while you're on licence, but when you do come off the licence, when you go back there and say you need more help, you don't get that help that you need. They don't have nothing to do, like they say you've come off your licence so they don't have nothing to do with you anymore.”

(Male ex-offender)

“Before they leave prison, they should be provided with enough information for them when they come out to know when they're headed. Most people that I saw there, they come out and they saying they homeless, their mum don't want them back home. And the worst thing is like, when you're in jail they give you a Connexions worker or whatever to talk to you or whatever but none of em really do stuff, they say oh I forgot about you or I'm gonna do something about it - there's a lot of people they come out and they're lost, and they dunno where to go.”

(Male ex-offender)

## About MYH

The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH) is a registered, award-winning national charity which provides pioneering faith and culturally sensitive services to Muslim youth in the UK.

Our core service is a free and confidential emotional support service available nationally via the telephone, email, internet and through the post. The service uses male and female volunteers trained in active listening skills, all between the ages of 18 and 30 years, to respond to client enquiries.

As well as a dedicated helpline, MYH runs an online peer-support service based around a website (muslimyouth.net). Our aim is to encourage British Muslim youth to develop peer-support networks, and to access specialist and mainstream support services, to help them achieve social and mental well-being. We also run creative projects with diverse groups of young people in London.

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## Additional Information

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