

2023

WHERE WE ARE TODAY



trailblazers[™]
INSPIRING NEW FUTURES



INTRODUCTION

Staffordshire University's school of Justice, Security and Sustainability was asked by Trailblazers Charity to examine the impact of the resettlement services provided to HMPPS. Staffordshire University was proud to be invited to conduct a review of Trailblazers services on the importance and the value of one-to-one mentoring within the Criminal Justice System. The report is formed from a collection of interviews from stakeholders, partners, service users and providers. Staffordshire University was given unfettered access and material by Trailblazers to determine the impact of their services to the individual and wider Criminal Justice agenda for reducing recidivism.

I am a Criminology with Offender Management student at Staffordshire University. I am passionate about changing lives and supporting people on their journey to success. I have conducted this report for Trailblazers to examine the importance and impact of mentoring on a one-to-one basis for increasing engagement, behavioural change, and desistance from crime. My conclusion is that I found Trailblazers to be a fantastic service which positively impacts the lives of many.



Author: Allana

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To identify the benefits and impact of a one to-one non-judgmental relationship' whereby a mentor provides time and support for the mentee to create positive change for the individual. To examine the impact of Trailblazers mentoring project at HMP Isis, Brixton, Featherstone, Brinsford and Aylesbury on reducing re-offending.
- To evidence where good partnership and collaborative working with other agencies exists.
- To evidence the value of providing the wrap around service needed for a successful reintegration into the community.

HOW WAS THE DATA COLLECTED

Interviews have been conducted with mentees, mentors, prison governors, stakeholders, and partners as a method of collecting primary data.

Consent to use the data within the report has been granted by all participants.

Secondary data from the Ministry of Justice and the [Østfold University College](#) have been used to present the similarities between the success of one-to-one mentoring on a national and international scale.



CONTENTS

- **A Word from the CEO (3)**
- **Prisons we Work in (4)**
- **Delivery Model (5)**
- **Impact (6)**
- **Mentoring the Evidence (7&8)**
- **Mentees Thoughts (9)**
- **Mentees Journey (10)**
- **Mentors Thoughts (11)**
- **Partners Thoughts (12)**
- **Prison Staff Thoughts (13 & 14)**
- **Projects & Partnerships (15)**
- **Partners & Supporters (16)**
- **Looking Ahead (17)**
- **Reflections from the Chair (18)**





trailblazers™
INSPIRING NEW FUTURES



JULIA ALEXANDER
CEO

A WORD FROM THE CEO

This year marks a significant milestone for Trailblazers – 25 years delivering mentoring services in prisons and communities. The past few years have been particularly challenging for the charity. The pandemic resulted in restricted access to the prisons for long periods, so our usual face to face mentoring was not possible. We were able to adapt services and it was commendable the efforts our mentors and staff made to keep connected with mentees but it wasn't the same as being able to meet in person. It also impacted the charity being able to implement its strategy of expanding services into other prisons across the country, further compounded by the increasingly challenging funding landscape, where competition to secure grants from Trusts and Foundations has risen markedly – the main source of income for Trailblazers.

However, new opportunities have arisen during this time. We introduced a range of practical support items at the time of release from prison which mentees have described as 'lifelines' in helping with resettlement, these have included food and clothing vouchers, a basic phone and travel cards. We were also able to give greater time and focus to developing our community services and building partnerships with a range of companies who could offer employment support and opportunities for those leaving prison. This has been hugely positive, and we are already hearing success stories from mentees who have benefited from this support and have gone onto secure employment.

Trailblazer's vision remains the same – to stop reoffending for good. We have consistently shown mentees who engaged in mentoring with the charity, have a significantly lower rate of reoffending (9% vs >38% national average in the first year of release, MOJ, 2021) and we will keep striving to lower this figure. We are seeing increasing demand for our services, and this is likely to continue with prison numbers rising - a report published by the Justice Committee in September 2023 predicts that the prison population will be over 100,000 by 2027.

I would personally like to thank everyone who has supported the charity over the past year. As this Annual Report reflects, each individual, really does make a difference.

Julia Alexander

PRISONS WE WORK IN

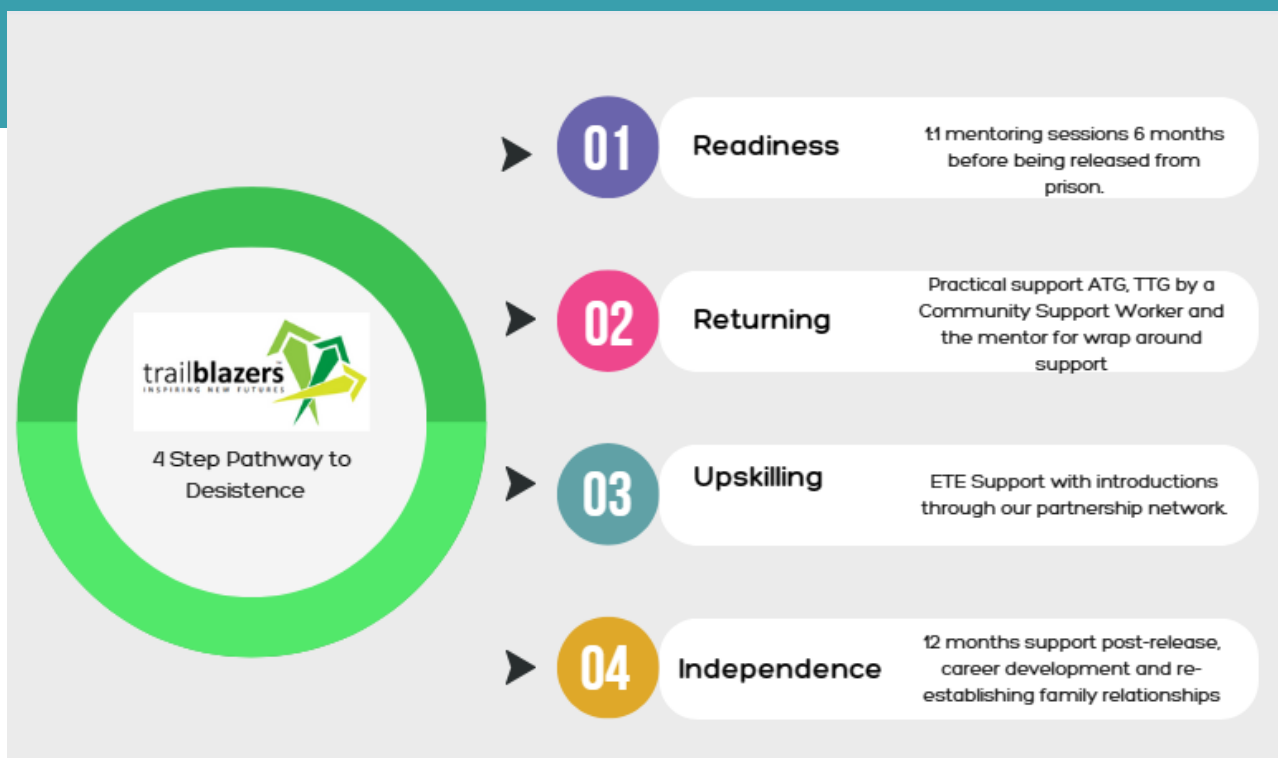
- HMP Brixton
- HMPYOI Isis
- HMP Aylesbury
- HMP Featherstone
- HMPYOI Brinsford

We work with 18-35 years old adults in prison with 6 months left of their custodial sentence, and post-release in the community.

Trailblazers offers intensive weekly, one-to-one mentoring in prison provided by an amazing group of volunteers. This helps the men in prison and on probation to gain in self-confidence and self-esteem to believe, plan, and realise re-building their lives on the 'outside'.



DELIVERY MODEL



SUPPORT TO ACHIEVE DESISTANCE

Readiness: Mentors are matched with mentees based on their interests, experience, skillset that best aligns with the mentee.

Returning to the community: We support mentees through the prison gates (TTG) by accompanying them to essential appointments and being their advocates on the day/week of release (e.g. probation, housing), Completing benefits applications, registering with GPs; providing care packages at the prison gates (ATG) on day of release – basic smartphone, travel cards, food and clothing vouchers plus basic living items if needed. **In 2022 we provided care packages to 70% mentees leaving prison.** Staff will sign post and refer to specialist providers, e.g., mental health. Upon leaving custody, a mentee may not meet the criteria of high street banks to open an account. Our partner Suits Me provide our mentees with an online bank account, enabling them to have control of their income and enhance their chance of gaining employment.

Upskilling: Severn Trent have pledged to provide 20 mentors for 2 years to encourage and support men in custody to raise their aspirations through mentoring and employability workshops with the aim to stop offending and secure employment post release.

Independence: Through the gate (TTG) in the community Trailblazers support continues for up to 12 months post release, even if the mentee has secured employment they may still want to work with their mentor to widen their scope and raise career aspirations to stop offending.



OUR IMPACT

98 MEN SUPPORTED TO STOP OFFENDING IN 2023

95%

Mentees fulfilling their license conditions when they are released.

90%

Avoiding reoffending in the critical first two years after release

80%

Securing safe permanent accommodation from the day of release and throughout their first year out of prison.

56%

engage in education, training and employment in their first year out of prison.

All prison leavers have ID, banking and a NI number set up before release – essential to apply for housing, benefits, health services, training, and employment.

To develop young prison leavers' self-esteem, confidence, education, and knowledge of positive opportunities, we asked mentees how Trailblazers has made an impact on their life:

- Over 80% of mentees will feel more positive about the future.
- Over 80% of mentees will have a better understanding of how their experiences have shaped their lives.
- Over 80% of mentees have greater independence, self-reliance, and feelings of self-worth.
- Improved relations with families and communities
- 80% education, training and employment opportunities open to all mentees.

To support mentees in achieving financial independence by:

- Helping them manage their money whether on benefit or working.
- Securing and staying in permanent employment

To harness the experience and dedication of volunteer mentors and enrich their lives.

DESISTENCE & MENTORING

THE EVIDENCE

Desistance is the process of stepping away from crime by men who have a previous history of offending. Desistance resides between the development of personal maturity, forming stronger or new meaningful social relationships and individual constructions - subject to the narrative of events built around the individuals changes and key life events.

Some of the key principles to achieve Desistance include:

Respecting individuality – the understanding that the process of moving away from offending behaviour is different for everyone, which requires a tailored plan to achieve desistance.

Building positive relationships – men in prison and on probation are influenced by those who they respect and feel the most valued by. This is for both personal and professional relationships.

Recognising the significance of social context - understanding that desistance is related to social aspects of an individual's life as well as psychological factors.

Recognising and developing individuals strengths – taking a strength-based approach to promote desistance.

Trailblazers mentoring is at the heart of desistance, creating strong bonds and relationships via a program which is tailored to achieve the goals and desires of an individual living in custody, right the way through to their release into the community. Mentoring is a good way to achieve desistance as mentors positively influence and encourage the mentee to achieve a better quality of life. Mentors can assist the mentee to find alternative routes to achieve a stable income and build a new social identity which complies with societal expectations.

To achieve this model, the mentor and mentee will develop a balanced, relationship to promote a better life for the mentee. Trailblazers aim to achieve this by:

- **Recognising the mentee's goals and provide constructive work to achieve those goals.**
- **Provide a tailored plan which is developed to the mentee's needs.**
- **Takes a pro-active and pro-social approach to reduce the risk of re-offending.**
- **Staying consistent with the plans created to achieve improved identities and transforming the lives of mentees.**



DESISTENCE & MENTORING

THE EVIDENCE

Desistance is the process of stepping away from crime by men who have a previous history of offending. Desistance resides between the development of personal maturity, forming stronger or new meaningful social relationships and individual constructions - subject to the narrative of events built around the individuals changes and key life events.

Some of the key principles to achieve Desistance include:

Respecting individuality – the understanding that the process of moving away from offending behaviour is different for everyone, which requires a tailored plan to achieve desistance.

Building positive relationships – men in prison and on probation are influenced by those who they respect and feel the most valued by. This is for both personal and professional relationships.

Recognising the significance of social context - understanding that desistance is related to social aspects of an individual's life as well as psychological factors.

Recognising and developing individuals strengths – taking a strength-based approach to promote desistance.

Trailblazers mentoring is at the heart of desistance, creating strong bonds and relationships via a program which is tailored to achieve the goals and desires of an individual living in custody, right the way through to their release into the community. Mentoring is a good way to achieve desistance as mentors positively influence and encourage the mentee to achieve a better quality of life. Mentors can assist the mentee to find alternative routes to achieve a stable income and build a new social identity which complies with societal expectations.

To achieve this model, the mentor and mentee will develop a balanced, relationship to promote a better life for the mentee. Trailblazers aim to achieve this by:

- **Recognising the mentee's goals and provide constructive work to achieve those goals.**
- **Provide a tailored plan which is developed to the mentee's needs.**
- **Takes a pro-active and pro-social approach to reduce the risk of re-offending.**
- **Staying consistent with the plans created to achieve improved identities and transforming the lives of mentees.**



MENTEES' THOUGHTS



HMP BRIXTON MENTEE (2023)
& PARTNERS AT BRIDGE RECRUITMENT

HMP BRINSFORD MENTEE (2023)

"I think more positively about the future, like getting a job... Trailblazers is a great service, its life changing".

HMP BRIXTON MENTEES (2023)

"It was a bit shaky at the start with me just coming out of jail, but he listens to me, and he's given me lots of feedback and helps me achieve my goals. I've achieved a lot of my goals, which I'm very happy and I couldn't have done this without my mentor. My mentor helped me, I felt like things are on track. I've got a job and getting my driving sorted. I thought this would take about 9 months, but we've done all this in 3 months".

"I didn't have positivity in my life but now I'm pushed to make positive relationships in my life".

HMP ISIS MENTEE (2023)

"My mentor is really helpful and productive, they help me to look for employment, create goals for the future I can turn to them for support... the dedication from my mentor and finding information on my behalf is the most memorable. I really see how the mentor does everything they can to improve my life"

- **83% OF OUR MENTEE'S SAID THEY ARE VERY LIKELY TO RECOMMEND TRAILBLAZERS.**
- **ALL OF OUR MENTEE'S SAID THEY FEEL/FELT PREPARED FOR THEIR RELEASE FROM CUSTODY.**
- **30% OF OUR MENTEE'S SAID THEY WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A MENTOR IN THE FUTURE.**

MENTEE'S JOURNEY

THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER IN ACTION

"I first met our mentee as he was coming towards the end of his first prison sentence. Upon release, the mentee engaged well but was still going through problems settling into the community. Things took a turn for the worse when he suffered the tragedy losing his mother suddenly and as a result of this become homeless. Instead of falling into the trap of reoffending and feeling down about his situation, the mentee turned this time to be reflective on where he was and what he wanted from life. With the help of our Community Support Worker, they looked at work and training. The mentee was a mechanic before he went to prison, he now has no driving license, and this area of employment was difficult to get back into.

I spoke to the mentee about many other options out there, but he knew what he wanted to do. He was fond of the entertainment industry and together he and the Community Support Worker searched for different roles.

Our mentee had no desire to stay in his hometown and wanted a fresh start somewhere new. During a conversation one day the subject of Butlins came up and together they applied for the role as a Redcoat. Our mentee has been working for there for four months now and he is doing well".

"I am grateful for the work Trailblazers put into helping me achieve this. Personally, I feel I am a different person, a lot more confident and have made new friends who I consider family". Our mentee was quite introverted when we first met him. To hear this, is amazing and inspirational. He now lives on site at Butlins and has done extensive training in several jobs. "There isn't a job I cannot do!".
(Brinsford Mentee, 2023)

We at Trailblazers wish him all the best for the future and are so proud of what he has achieved.

In 2023 In 2023 Trailblazers was awarded GOLD standard Second Chances Charter by the West Midlands Crime Police Commission for being an inclusive employer proving people with lived experience paid employment.



MENTORS' THOUGHTS



TRAILBLAZER MENTORS

MENTORING DOES NOT JUST IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE MENTEE; IT ALSO BENEFITS OUR MENTORS. MANY OF OUR MENTORS VOLUNTEER TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OTHERS, HOWEVER THEY ALSO FIND THAT THEY LEARN A LOT FROM MENTORING MEN IN PRISON AND MEN ON PROBATION.

"I am more patient; I would class myself as a non-judgmental person but I am even more non-judgmental. I am more grateful and have a more positive outlook on my own life, I am stronger and more resilient. I have a really good relationship with my supervisor, we bounce ideas off with open and honest conversations which facilitate growth. I feel part of a wider community, not just with TB but with the prison staff, the librarian and math's teacher and smarts. I am 100% supported by my Project Manager".

"I cherish the insights and learnings I get from mentoring offenders, making a tangible difference to peoples' lives, widening their perspectives and horizons and applying their skills and experience in supporting mentees who are engaged, curious and above all have a huge desire to re-build their lives".

"Trailblazers have shown me that people are not the monsters which the papers tell you they are. The people in the police custody booking photos aren't the same as when you walk past them or meet them. Things are not as they seem; things can change in a second. I don't believe any one person is defined by a single event".



The King's Award
for Voluntary Service

We have more than
120 mentors
providing over
3,500 hours
of 1:1 mentoring per annum

In 2022 Trailblazers was shortlisted for the Kings Voluntary Awards

PARTNERS' THOUGHTS



Elizabeth Heath,
Societal Strategy Lead

“We have developed an excellent working relationship with Trailblazers over the last year. They are a dedicated team and I appreciate their advice and support. We have 14 colleagues mentoring and we’re running employability training to small cohorts in Brinsford Prison; this year we will have supported 40 people in Brinsford either with mentoring or employability skills. I recommend working with Trailblazers as a corporate partner, mentoring is a significant time commitment but I know my colleagues are finding it hugely rewarding and we know that by working with Trailblazers, we’re able to make a positive difference”.



Justin Maggs,
Professional Development & Business Skills Learning Stream Lead

“We have taken our existing community content and worked with Trailblazers to make it more relevant and accessible for young men in the prison environment. Working in prisons is a completely new environment for us and our partnership has enabled us to understand what is genuinely needed and prepare our employees for working in that environment”.

“Trailblazers have been very easy to work with. The mentor workshops North-52 ran were tailored to Trailblazer's specific needs and the feedback from attendees has been amazing with 100% satisfaction rating. At North-52 we get a lot of personal satisfaction seeing the mentors grow and develop but it is also very motivating to hear about the impact the mentors have had with mentees. In terms of partnership, I would recommend partnering with Trailblazers - they are great communicators and passionate about their positive and inspirational objectives. I would absolutely recommend it”.



Tessa Dowell, North-52 Director

“My motivation to becoming mentor is because it is quite close to home, quite a personal experience which I had gone through, and family and friends who a lot of us have faced the situations. I've needed help myself so I know what it's like and how lonely it can be and the struggles you can face. This was my opportunity to reach out and help as many people as I can. Recruitment was amazing, everyone was so friendly and very informative. It was a quick turnaround, it wasn't daunting. It was so open and gave me the ability to talk about experiences without being judged. They were really informative, and it really helped me with the first initial session with the mentee. I was given the understanding of what other people are thinking. It was eye opening”.

PRISON STAFF THOUGHTS



HM Prison &
Probation Service

“When people come into prison it can be destabilizing, effectively being in a prison environment strips away the ability for a person to make decisions for themselves; everything that they need to do they heavily rely on someone they don’t know to facilitate. One of the biggest benefits of having a Trailblazers mentor I’ve seen is a sense of safety and security with the one-to-one interaction, providing that layer of comfort. There is a lack of confidence or a sense of shame [with the men in prison] when talking about how people have got to and then experience prison and I think by creating opportunities for people to build trusting relationships with people who aren’t involved in the day to day stresses and the routine of the environment, it creates an alternative conversation and outlook. Mentees may think more positively, build their hopes and where life might take them despite their experiences in the past. It also takes away the pressure associated with accountability because it’s not about someone else’s opinion or judgement but their personal perspective”.



**Mia Wheeler, HMP Brixton
Governor, HMP Brixton Governor**



“Trailblazers mentoring gives the men that pathway, I have spent a lot of time with young men who believe everything is someone else’s fault, but having a Trailblazers mentor allows the men to start taking responsibility for themselves and their future. I see an improvement in their confidence, and they have a much better sense of purpose and hope. I think that the big thing for me is they go through a change of seeing everything as a barrier to seeing a pathway forwards”.

Emily Thomas, HMPYOI Isis Governor

PRISON STAFF THOUGHTS



HM Prison & Probation Service

“As a resettlement prison for young people, we rely on the support, expertise, and commitment of all partner agencies. They help us to achieve our overall aspirations of being the best we can be, and work collaboratively to meet the complex and ever-changing needs of our young population. For as long as I can remember, Trailblazers have always been around in prisons, even when I wasn’t working directly with them, I was aware of the incredible work they were doing in the background. However, since being Head of Reducing Reoffending at Brinsford, they have been very much in the foreground and actively contributing towards preparing our young people for release. I do not underestimate the challenges that come with trying to engage with young people, connection is difficult for a whole host of reasons including neurodivergent needs, trauma, ACE’s, low maturity, attachment problems and care experience. However, I have the upmost confidence that our vulnerable young people are in safe hands when working with Trailblazers mentors. We share the same values and aspirations and a collective appetite for creating the very best outcomes for young people in our care.”

Lawson Painting
HMPYOI Brinsford Head of Reducing Re-Offending



PROJECTS & PARTNERSHIPS

SEVERN
TRENT



Prison Leaver Project

- Severn Trent will provide up to 20 mentors a year in 2023 & 2024 to support young men in Prison, in the West Midlands, and post-release.
- Severn Trent is delivering employability workshops in conjunction with Trailblazers to deliver directly in the prison, to encourage and support prison leavers into work post-release and reduce the risk of re-offending.



- **14 Mentors recruited**
- **8 Employability workshops delivered to 20 men**

Peer 2 Peer Project

Birmingham
Adult
Education
Service



Accredited Mentoring qualifications delivered in Oakwood Prison to **16 men** by BAES, in partnership with Trailblazers for men serving longer sentences. Trailblazers are now planning to replicate the success of the project with HMP Featherstone.



Investing in Men's Wellbeing

Level 5 student counsellors supporting mentees in the West Midlands, and Trailblazers staff. with wellbeing. **16 counsellors** recruited so far to implement wellbeing support from the end of November 2023.

PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS



Employment provider setup by ex-offenders for ex-offenders in the West-Midlands.

Apprentice opportunities with Bounce Back in the London.



providing pro-bono marketing support



Pro-bono support through expert delivery training for volunteer mentors, upskilling and enhancing support.



Newman University
BIRMINGHAM



Academic relationships to assess impact of Trailblazers services have been forged with several academic establishments in the West Midlands and London.

·Based in London – providing tailored support for mentees through cv writing, interview preparation, creating job opportunities for men leaving HMPYPPI Isis and HMP Brixton.



Trailblazers mentees recruited to repair and re-sell bikes in London.

Partnership created with the only e-money service allowing accounts to be setup by staff pre-release with Trailblazers staff providing charity endorsement to verify mentees.



suits me.

Corporate, government and Charity organisations offering education, training and employment opportunities including:

Government and local authority – Universal credit and housing benefits; housing departments; health and family charities; GP / health clinics; rehabilitation services. Zen Photography and Envy produced pro-bono short films' Media Trust (social media development).

Trailblazers would like to thank all the Trusts and Foundations and other donors who have given generously to the charity and without their continued support, it wouldn't be possible to delivery our services'



trailblazers
mentoring
inspiring new futures

LOOKING AHEAD

Partnership and collaboration – focus on maintaining current partnerships and developing new ones – especially with partners who can offer employment support, training or jobs in a range of sectors for those leaving prison.

Operational Resilience – to enable the charity to expand its services into new prisons and communities which will allow us to support more people.

Volunteering – increase the range of roles and opportunities within the charity, in particular, for those who have used our services.

At Trailblazers we recognise that we cannot achieve our vision alone. We are committed to developing our existing partnerships with prisons, corporates and other stakeholders alongside identifying new opportunities for collaboration, to ensure we continue to offer quality services to mentees which support them to stop re-offending.



trailblazers™
INSPIRING NEW FUTURES



CARINA KEMP
CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Every day I am reminded of individuals' tenacity and personal triumphs in coping with the adversities of life in prison and then rebuilding independent, fulfilling lives free of crime back in the community.

Our mentees are supported through their journeys by an amazing group of volunteer mentors and inspirational staff team. Our team do not just have a wealth of life experience to draw upon but are skilled in understanding the needs of individual mentees, offering non-judgemental advice, an empathetic ear and practical advice. In turn our volunteers' feedback they really value their peer support, extensive training provided by Trailblazers and an opportunity to learn from the mentees themselves – enriching their lives and helping them give back to the community.

Absolutely central to our success is our staff team - their commitment, professionalism, compassion and pragmatism is unstinting. Not a day passes when I am not in awe of their individual contributions and ability to tap into their own professional and personal lives for the benefit of the charity, our volunteers and mentees.

Trailblazers is a small charity – arguably punching well above our size in the impact our mentees and team achieve. The last four years have been tough; navigating the pandemic; an increasingly difficult funding environment; rising costs; with prison and probation services under huge strain and at capacity. We are hugely grateful to all the support we are given from our corporate, charity and government partners, funders, and supporters. But with more funding and support we could achieve even more. Helping more people in custody avoid re-offending, enabling 'ex-offenders' to contribute back to their communities, reframing the narrative about people with experience in criminal justice and save the Exchequer an enormous amount of money.

Do come and join us on this journey in whatever way you can contribute – whether it is your time; funding through regular giving, sponsorship, or grants; tapping into a talent pool of people through access to training and employment opportunities or joint partnerships with organisations offering complimentary services.

Carina Kemp



Support Trailblazers mission to STOP offending and reduce Trailblazers re-offending rate from 9% - 0%

- **Fulfil your corporate responsibility** through fundraising, sharing your expertise with Trailblazers, donating unused tech such as phones, laptops and tablets. We are open to hear your ideas and suggestions for collaboration.
- **Enhance your services** partner with us to join our rapidly growing service. We are particularly interested in partnering with education, training, and employment providers, health services, housing, enhancing family relationships.
- **Become a volunteer mentor:** If you would like to take an active role and make a difference to many lives. Mentoring is not for everyone but we are always open to hear how you can support us through other volunteering initiatives. please visit our website to find out more.
- **Support us** helping men leaving prison to rebuild their lives through individual fundraising, or a donation by visiting our JustGiving page below, or visit our website.
- **Commission us:** thanks to the generosity of key supporters, partners, charitable trusts and foundations, we have been able to grow into the unique charity that we are today. With long term funding – we can make plans for the future, without worry that support for our men will be disrupted, affecting their stability and trust in our service.

Contact Trailblazers:

(W) www.trailblazersmentoring.org.uk

(E) info@trailblazersmentoring.org.uk

(T) 0800 193 4046

www.justgiving.com/trailblazersmentoring