

## Probation and social enterprise partnership perspective

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[www.westmerciaprobation.org.uk](http://www.westmerciaprobation.org.uk)

[www.willowdenefarm.org.uk](http://www.willowdenefarm.org.uk)



Dr Matt Home (centre) pictured on the farm

Willowdene Farm provides drug rehabilitation and training to men aged between about 20 and 45. The programme provided sees the issues that led to addiction being tackled and overcome, provides training and equipping for a purposeful, productive future, and offers an environment for personal and social development.

In 2004 Willowdene underwent a restructure and as a result set up two social enterprises that reflected the two areas of core business: Willowdene Rehabilitation and Willowdene Training. The resultant clarity of business led to increased interest in Willowdene and opened up new pools of resources.

Willowdene approached West Mercia Probation Trust in 2007/8 as part of its growth strategy and with a desire to engage in a commissioning process for the greater good. The NOMS tender in 2009/10 was the opportunity they were looking for, having established a relationship with West Mercia Probation Trust based on shared values.

Willowdene wanted funding for long term sustainability so grant funding wasn't an option. The current contract with NOMS means working to payment by results but it also means that Willowdene has maintained its identity and is able to run the service on its terms and work to its own sustainability model, as a result of negotiation with commissioners. The pilot was successful, as 75% of all offenders did not re-offend for the duration of the programme.

## LEARNING POINTS

### Willowdene and West Mercia Probation

- Use existing services rather than starting something new: this is usually more cost effective and better meets local needs. Create space for pilots.
- Find partners who share your ethos and values and invest time in building a strong relationship with them
- Create an environment where you are not just following the money but be willing to adjust your business model in response to research and environmental factors.
- Watch the external environment carefully and identify where best to position your service. How you present and badge your business will influence the opportunities available. Remember to promote the partnership – it is essential to positioning the work and facilitating success
- Develop a model or approach based on robust research and stick to it. Don't keep changing to appeal to the latest funding opportunity.
- Have a clear strategy and a planned approach, so you can respond quickly to opportunities and challenges that arise (e.g. recruitment or redundancy).
- Make sure local priorities are addressed in your plan.
- Having that wider trust and confidence in the project is vital to success. Get the confidence of wider stakeholders, not just immediate partners, for example, magistrates.
- Develop a communication systems so as to engage all stakeholders, including the families of ex-offenders.
- Don't forget that in an ideal world we would be so successful as to become redundant!
- NOMS has yet to settle on a way of working for the future; this creates a window of opportunity for social enterprise involvement in service delivery. It is anticipated that this window will be open for about 18 months.