

23.7.2020

Dear Danny,

Thank you for inviting us to contribute to your proposals to enable communities to continue to rise to the many challenges presented by COVID-19. It was a pleasure to meet with you when you led Only Connect and I know you will be aware of our work at Spark Inside providing life coaching to young people and prison officers to support desistance from crime, contribute to a reduction in violence in prisons, and enable rehabilitation. Like you, we believe that connected, resilient communities are the bedrock of economic and social prosperity. Life coaching enables self-sufficiency, fosters independence and builds personal responsibility; it is entrepreneurial spirit distilled into a replicable and practical program of action.

There is a substantial and robust academic literature supporting the view that employment and relationships are critical components of successfully negotiating the challenging period immediately following release from prison. It is also the case that the short to medium term outlook for the job market is poor. This is particularly true for young people who have been prevented from pursuing education and employability training in prisons as a result of COVID-19 constraints, and who are unfortunately more likely to be employed in sectors vulnerable to shutdowns.

We welcomed the Prime Minister's recent recognition that the safety of the street one grows up on has an impact on one's opportunities, and the Opportunity Guarantee that will go some way toward mitigating the economic and social challenges facing young people as a result of COVID-19. We also welcomed the commitment made in the Conservative Party manifesto to improve employment outcomes for people coming out of prison. To support these critical objectives, we believe your work with Baroness Barran should include specific proposals to help young people released from prison, as a uniquely disadvantaged group, to develop a strong and meaningful stake in their communities. In particular, we believe;

- 1) Young people leaving prison should be recognised as a vulnerable group, given the high prevalence of underlying physical and mental health conditions among this group, many of which will have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 restrictions in prisons
- 2) Additional mental health and wellbeing guidance and support on both sides of the prison gate should be provided, as this will be a particular risk for young people leaving prison. This could include targeted life coaching interventions, or simply enabling community volunteers to provide emotional and practical support to those leaving prison

Your work in this area offers a golden opportunity to integrate young people at risk of exclusion from the informal community relationships that will support desistance and rehabilitation. We would welcome the opportunity to contribute further to your proposals as they develop.

Yours sincerely,

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