

TWO ROUTES TO EMPLOYMENT BUT ONE MAY BE HARDER THAN THE OTHER

Research has shown that employment is a key factor in the reduction of re-offending but, in contrast, unemployment amongst ex-offenders is particularly high. In Italy a person with a recent sentence has 8 times fewer opportunities to find a job, while having a job reduces the chances of re-offending by 30%. Over 80% of ex-offenders have no employment prospects when they leave prison and often the time spent in prison has not offered them any realistic preparation for a job or any meaningful form of work experience.

The [SALIS](#) Development Partnership (DP) believes that the only way of helping these ex-offenders is to organise genuine collaborative networks involving the institutions and private actors in society and to establish creative relationships between prisons, companies and social enterprises, civil society, and the many agencies concerned with training, guidance and social support. These types of interests have come together to create the Servizi per l'Autonomia, il Lavoro e l'Inclusione Sociale (Services for Autonomy, Work and Social Inclusion) which is the full title of the project.

The activities of this DP take account of the Council's Recommendations ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies that proposes that Italy should increase access to efficient personalised services and participation in active labour market schemes and also pay particular attention to the situation of the young, the disadvantaged and the low-skilled.

"The time has come to consider prison no longer as being separate from the civil, urban and cultural context," says the President of Pescara Provincial Administration, Mr. De Dominicis, *"Opening prisons to civil society and civil society to prisoners needs collaboration from the different stakeholders to overcome prejudices at different levels. This is the main aim of our project and we know that nothing effective can be done unless all the actors work together!"* SALIS with such a partnership in place helps ex-offenders adjust to the demands of the local community and the possibility of a new job, while resolving any financial or social problems that may hinder the total rehabilitation process.

CREATING DEPENDENT AND POSSIBLY INDEPENDENT EMPLOYMENT

The target area for S.A.L.I.S. is the Abruzzo Region, which is in the west just slightly below the centre of Italy, although its activities mainly take place in the Metropolitan Area of Pescara. The project began in June 2005, as a successor to the [ReLaIS](#) DP and it is building on the achievements of this project that operated during the first Round of EQUAL.

It is focusing on the existing guidance and social services and helping them to make practical and realistic responses to the needs of offenders and ex-offenders. It is also raising their awareness of the importance of self-empowerment, as a way of enhancing the vocational and personal identity of target groups. One major step forward from ReLaIS. is the fact that thanks to a dedicated enterprise incubator, SALIS is providing not only employment offers but also the chance to "become your own boss" and for many ex-offenders, it represents a longer and more demanding route to employment. This ambitious scheme of creating new entrepreneurs from ex-offenders is dealt with in some detail in the last section on innovation.

The DP sees itself as having two types of beneficiaries. In the first category are the intermediate beneficiaries that include public and/or private sector operators in the social, health, employment and prison sectors that are reached by the project's awareness raising and sensitisation campaigns. They come to share project's objectives and learn to use the new methods and approaches that the DP is developing. Also included in this category are employers who benefit through the training that SALIS provides to company tutors and coaches. The second category is the final beneficiaries and these include both males and females who are:

- Those inmates of the "Casa Circondariale San Donato" prison in Pescara, who are allowed to leave the prison during the day to undertake some form of work experience;

- Individuals who are serving out their conviction in the community and who are supervised by Pescara's Social Service Centre for Adults;
- Ex-prisoners who make direct contact with the project.

In ReLaIS, there were 58 beneficiaries and 45 of these completed the training programme. A total of 21 out of 45 also had a stage with 16 receiving a grant for this work experience. Some 15 enterprises took part and a slightly greater number is expected to be involved in the SALIS project, which intends to assist 40 direct beneficiaries in their reintegration.

THE INCLUSION PATH

Learning from the experience of ReLaIS, the DP is establishing Individualised Inclusion Paths for each of its final beneficiaries. This is made possible by the fact that all of the partners in the project are committed to developing strong on-going contacts not only with the offenders and ex-offenders but also with the intermediary beneficiaries. The Path starts with what the project calls a "Demand Analysis" which identifies the individual's strengths and weaknesses and on this basis, an assessment is made as to whether the Employee or Entrepreneur Inclusion Path is the best one to follow. The elements in both of these paths are the same but the emphasis is different. The components include:

- **Training** in basic skills including safety on the job, company organisation and the labour market requirements and also in transverse skills such as team-working and problem-solving;
- A **"satge"** or period of work experience paid for by the "Borsa lavoro" (Working Bursary) that provides technical and vocational learning and, where appropriate, a second type of learning focused on management skills to develop entrepreneurship;
- **Accompanying support and tutoring** provided by the "Inclusion Team", along the whole of the path;
- **Follow up** to monitor progress in all of the activities undertaken by the "Inclusion Team".

The only difference between the paths is that those individuals who are hoping to become entrepreneurs also receive information, advice and after-care to support the creation of new trading and handicraft companies.

ALL EMBRACING SUPPORT

The support offered by the DP is not simply employment orientated. Members of the target group, who may have problems with drugs, can find help at SERT, the local Drug Addiction Service. While SERT is not a formal partner in the DP it works very closely with the project and its beneficiaries. Another aspect with which SALIS is concerned is housing. Through one of its partners, Confesercenti (the Association of Commerce, Tourism and Service Enterprises), it has made a number of agreements with 10 Hotels to ensure that beneficiaries can find reasonably priced accommodation for a maximum period of 6 months.

This support has certainly been of great help to Sergio Scanu who started his Inclusion Path with ReLaIS and keeps in contact with SALIS. Sergio says *"When I left prison I was half expecting to be living on the streets and you don't get many chances when you have to steal. If you have a job you are more likely to avoid trouble. Now, I have a home and a job, thanks to the project and my employer who was willing to trust me."* In addition a very interesting short video has been filmed by the DP which illustrates the temptations that an ex-offender faces when he/she leaves prison. It also shows how these temptations can be overcome or removed by the various agencies in the project working together to create an effective Inclusion Plan. If you would like to obtain a copy, please send an e-mail to salis@libero.it.

THE VITAL ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

As Sergio indicates, the involvement of employers is crucial to the success of the project. The project uses two of its partners to get in touch with employers. Confesercenti and, in Abruzzo, the majority of its 8.000 members are shopkeepers, while CNA, the National Crafts Association, has



2.000 members in the region. In addition, the Italian Farmers' Federation which is not a formal partner helps the DP to contact its members. Joele Cirone, an entrepreneur and member of **CNA** explains that *"Once we employers have had a successful experience of employing an offender we get together and try to come up with strategies for involving others. Quite often we will get together over a glass of wine with those entrepreneurs or employers that we want to recruit into the project."* Naturally, the DP is keen to offer whatever

incentives it can to attract employers.

There is an existing Italian Law of 22 June 2000 entitled Regulation to promote the occupational inclusion of ex-prisoners "Norme per favorire l'attività lavorativa dei detenuti" that provides tax reductions to entrepreneurs who offer prisoners, especially young prisoners, work experience and training on the job while they are still in prison for a period of time of not less than 30 days. However, this law is rarely used because of the complexity of its procedures and the DP is pressing for these to be simplified.

A PLANNED PARTNERSHIP

Just as the methods and approaches of SALIS have benefited from the experience of ReLaIS., so has its partnership. Patrizia Monacelli believes that this time the partnership is even stronger because *"we are now in contact with the top-level stakeholders, we have a better involvement of employers and sectors through CNA, Confesercenti and our contacts with the Farmers' Federation and now we have almost established a local, shared strategy."* In addition to the Employer Bodies, the Province of Pescara, as promoter, brings with it the local Employment Services and Educational and Training Provision. This is complemented by the involvement of the regional service of ENFAP that is the National Body for Vocational Education and Training. Last but not least, PRAP the National Department for Prison Administration is represented through its Abruzzo-Molise office.

Thus, the project does seem to be very representative. The partners have the professional skills required to fulfil the DP's objectives and they also have a range of social and economic contacts that are very helpful in involving other individuals and agencies in the project's activities and will also be invaluable when it comes to the DP's mainstreaming phase. They have already shown that they have the ability to network and function well in partnership, with these good management skills being demonstrated in the effective operation of the range of small, interdependent working groups that plan and implement various activities. Here leadership is based on proven competence and skills in the activity in question.

The successful operation of the DP is attributable to a number of factors including the workshops that the partners held with local services very early on in its development. These helped produce criteria to ensure that the partnership would produce positive outcomes. Now, in terms of efficiency, all partners are committed to:

- Consuming fewer resources for the same quantitative-qualitative level of service offered through optimising the human resources;
- Increasing the resource level through proactive managerial strategies

- Diverting any spare or extra resources towards an increasingly high level of quality of services;
- Providing visibility for relevant policy activities including those that are developed outside the partnership;
- Providing services that have a collective use.

In addition, the DP has developed a set of three standard forms to ensure uniformity in activities and better communication inside the project. Two are questionnaires that are used by all partners to record contacts and progress with beneficiaries and employers. The third form is for recording minutes and this is used for all DP meetings including the small working groups.

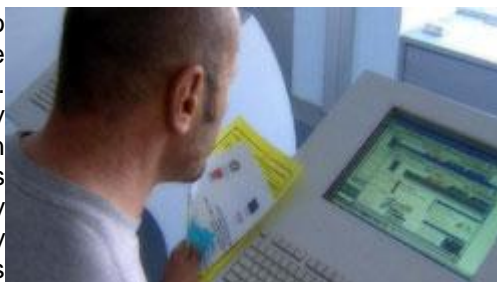
However, Patrizia Monacelli recognises that not everything is always perfect. She feels *that "one weakness is the lack of flexibility of some of the partners as they are public administrations with somewhat bureaucratic procedures."* She also reports that *"at the beginning we had some difficulties in moving from the former working procedures of ReLaIS to the new more intensive methods of cooperation in SALIS but we have got over most of these now."*

INNOVATION AND AMBITION

There are many aspects of innovation in the operation of the DP, including the operation of an Integrated Territorial Model, based on the local, shared strategy referred to above and backed-up by intranet and extranet networks, activated on the SALIS web site. Of course, the creation of an "Inclusion Team" from partner agencies to support beneficiaries along their Inclusion Paths is also a novel development, but the most challenging and the most ambitious task that the DP has set itself is to create Entrepreneurs from Ex-Offenders. The DP sees this autonomous route as being a way of avoiding the prejudice or stereotyping of employers or work colleagues, as ex-offenders search for an acceptable and economically-viable form of work.

Business Incubation

It may appear that such ambitions could be difficult to fulfil but with the help of the CNA and the Confesercenti, SALIS has made a very good start. CNA has four offices in the region that offer a variety of support services to enterprises and entrepreneurs in relation to social security, tax, health regulations, loans and incentives, industrial policy and the labour policy and Confesercenti has 16 offices and is deeply involved in creating development strategies for SMEs and micro-businesses.



By using their existing offices in the region and the experience and skills of their staff both of these organisations are contributing to the creation of a new service called CIS or an Integrated Service Centre. While each of these centres is prepared to assist ex-offenders in finding and retaining a "normal" job, they are all dedicated to ensuring that ex-offenders also have the best possible opportunity to create a business and each CIS centre is designed to welcome and support these potential entrepreneurs. They provide guidance and entrepreneurial training, and help with the design of the new enterprise and the production of a business plan. In essence, these offices are the incubators that assist with business start-up and then continue to provide tutoring, as the business begins to grow. _

Start-up Loans

One of the most significant advances has been the establishing of a line of micro-credit that can be used by ex-offenders to set up their own business. The CNA in Pescara and the Province of Pescara is working with the Cooperativa Artigiana di garanzia Futura and, also, FINART, which are two organisations providing loans and financial guarantees to local artisans and small and medium sized enterprises. Together, they have provided a fund of 50.000 euro to be used to cover guarantee expenses with local banks, when ex-prisoners ask for a loan. Carmine Salce,

the local Director of the National Confederation for the Craft Sector and Small and Medium Enterprises, explains that *"in the case of normal business operations such a guarantee fund would allow loans for an amount 15 times bigger, but in this case where the banks believe the risk is much greater, with the 50.000 euro the multiplier is only 4 and it will generate only a fund of 200.000 euro."* This means that up to 50 loans will be available at an average of 4.000 euro to be repaid over 36 months. Also, the good news is that the bank is prepared to increase the multiplier in relation to the number of the loans that are paid back on time. For those who would like more information about this type of financing, a paper entitled "Proposal of constitution of a guarantee fund to support the new enterprises set up by inmates or ex-inmates serving outside their conviction" is available in English and Italian.

SALIS is one of only twelve DPs in the second Round of EQUAL that has taken the risk of pioneering entrepreneurship as an employment option for ex-offenders. It will be interesting to monitor its progress and those of the other equally courageous projects.

The Three Most Important Lessons from SALIS

1. The DP has discovered that, in building an operational reintegration system, it is important to focus on "intermediate beneficiaries" such as public or private operators in the social, health, employment and prison sectors. Through awareness raising and training, they can come to share the DP's objectives and learn to use its new methods and approaches in their work with ex-offenders.
2. The DP is convinced that the support of employers is vital to the success of its reintegration plans and has found that the use of "go-betweens" or intermediaries, such as federations of employers or those individual employers who have had positive experiences of recruiting ex-offenders, is the most effective way of gaining such support.
3. The DP believes that an autonomous route to employment means that ex-offenders do not have to face prejudice or stereotyping of employers and work colleagues in their search to find an acceptable and economically-viable form of work. Thus, it has been prepared to invest in arranging business incubation services and start-up loans for ex-offenders.

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