

A REGIONAL MODEL FOR RE-INTEGRATING OFFENDERS

There are about 59.000 prisoners, in Italy. Only 5% of these are women and nearly three quarters are between 21 and 40 years of age. Foreign prisoners represent 34% of the total and approximately one third of these come from North Africa, another third from East Eastern Europe and the Balkans, while EU citizens are little more than 5%.

In the Piedmont Region of Italy, which is next to the border with France and Switzerland, there are around 4700 prisoners (8% of the national total) housed in 13 institutions throughout its eight provinces. As in other areas of Italy, there are few opportunities to take part in work experience if you are a prisoner. Less than 5% of the prisoners have some form of work to do and of these, only a fifth are working for a company rather than undertaking tasks for the penal institution and so, this really inhibits the opportunities of offenders getting some type of employment on their release.

Recognising these problems, the EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) Carcere e territorio, sistemi integrati operativi (Prison and the territory, operational systems for integration) aimed to ensure that (ex) – prisoners had the same chance of finding and retaining a job as any other citizen, whilst also assisting them in their social re-integration. The DP, called Car.Te.S.I.O. for short, was also anxious to build a unified regional support system.

The actual system that the DP has put in place is very much in line with the Country Specific Recommendations addressed to Italy that are contained in the Council's Recommendations ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies. This document proposes that there should be increased access to efficient personalised services and participation in active labour market schemes and particular attention paid to the situation of the young, the disadvantaged and the low-skilled, as ways of attracting more people to the labour market and making work a real option for all.

"We are luckier than many other organisations, as we don't need European project money to fund our core operations," explains Dino Tessa from CFPP Casa di Carità - Onlus, the DP's lead partner, *"as we have already worked in a number of prisoner projects, we were quite happy to pass the baton on to others who could multiply our approach."* Those who were chosen to take the approach forward were the other two partners - the Regional Office of PRAP, the National Department for Prison Administration, and Confcooperative Piemonte, the Regional Confederation of Cooperatives. In addition, the involvement of each of eight Provinces in its local action was another important way of spreading the DP's most important messages.

ESTABLISHING A COORDINATED AND COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

Car.Te.S.I.O. built on the experience of the CFPP (Centro formazione professionale per l'inserimento di persone svantaggiate per motivi di giustizia or the Vocational Training Centre for Offenders) of Casa di Carità – Onlus. Its work in the re-integration of offenders began in 1994 with a Horizon project and carried on with other projects funded by the Integra and Now strands of the EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative. During 2002 to 2004, within the first Round of EQUAL, Car.Te.S.I.O. attempted to develop the outcomes of these former projects and to build them into proactive labour and social policies within the region. In the words of Donatella Pallottino who works for CFPP, *"the general objective of the project has been to create conditions for working and social reintegration for prisoners, ex-prisoners, men and women, adults and minors, starting from old experiences made in the past on the same topic and testing strategies and an innovative model of intervention"*.

There were three main components to the DP's model:

- Local Coordination;

- Developing Opportunities for Jobs and Work Placements;
- Creating Wider Social Support.

LOCAL COORDINATION

This began with the creation of local networks called GOLs (Local Operatives Groups). The GOLs were formed in the geographical areas around each prison, with one exception where two prisons were served by one GOL. Each of the 12 GOLs that were established brought together, the Municipality, the Social Service Centre, Vocational Training Providers, Voluntary Organisations, PRAP and the other DP partners. Together, the members of the GOL had an opportunity to plan and deliver a comprehensive service for the integration of ex-offenders on their release from the local prison(s), according to the social policies and social provision that exists in the area.

One important aspect that assisted the coordination of the service was that one file was created for each prisoner and this was shared between all of the organisations and agencies to which he or she was referred. The various members of staff in these agencies and other operators concerned with the social and vocational integration of offenders also received support. A total of 400 such individuals were involved in the work of the DP and they were offered information and advice and different types of inter-professional training. The training was often in the form of “Concertation Clinics” or Dialogue Clinics that enabled the DP partners to pass on their expertise to the participants and provided an opportunity for these “trainees” to share and discuss their own experiences. A total of 20 training sessions took place in each of the Provinces of Asti and Alessandria and over 20 Concertation Clinics were held in Turin.

DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOBS AND WORK PLACEMENTS

Vocational Training in Catering



You take some flour... to make a pasta base...

The vocational development of the ex-offenders was also underpinned by this local coordination but here the knowledge and contacts of two of the partners come to the fore. CFPP Casa di Carità – Onlus, the lead organisation, helped all the local GOLs, through its experience as a training agency and its presence in all of the prisons in the region. Similarly, Confcooperative, with its eight provincial offices, was in a good position to make effective contacts with cooperatives who could offer a “stage” or work placement or even a full time job. In doing this, Confcooperative was very careful to match the demand and supply of jobs.

In the end, 48 local cooperatives were associated with the employment activities of the DP.

With the help of CFPP and Confcooperative, it was possible to develop realistic “work insertion” plans for the prisoners’ release involving vocational training and a stage. The DP accepted that these plans should start from the situation of each prisoner or ex-offender. It was important that he or she should be encouraged and motivated to assume an active attitude and to bring his or her own resources, no matter how minimal, as an essential contribution to the plan. In this way, the individuals, with their own histories and systems of relationships, became the protagonists and creators of their own success.



...for a delicious lasagne.

Car.Te.S.I.O. also made useful initial steps in transforming the time spent in prison into an opportunity for vocational re-integration. As Marco Girardello, one of the vocational training and integration operators, explained, “today, many prisoners can work outside jail because we have together created social and economic reinsertion programmes for them and the prison authorities recognise the value of these plans.” Also from the French system just across the border, learning

about how to structure and organise work options in prisons helped the DP make a strong start on the extending the value and the number of the work experience opportunities that were available within the penal institutions in Piedmont.

CREATING WIDER SOCIAL SUPPORT

One aim of the DP was to prevent re-offending because normally 75% of all prisoners are reconvicted some time after their release. The DP realised that “having a place of your own” was extremely important in helping ex-offenders feel settled and accepted in the world outside prison. Thus, considerable effort and energy was invested in searching for living accommodation. Most enquires about accommodation were received by local referral agencies and the operators identified possibilities in terms of suitable houses or apartments. After this local planning, contact was then made with CFPP Casa di Carità - Onlus because, as the lead organisation, it was responsible for the financial management of the project. If the request from the referral agency seemed to be appropriate, CFPP would then underwrite the tenancy or letting agreement. A similar procedure also applied to the provision of financial resources for the ‘stages’ or periods of work experience.

Apart from housing, the DP created arrangements to deal with other problems that prisoners or ex-offenders might face. Confcooperative set up a help desk in all of the 13 prisons and was actively involved in counselling or tutoring prisoners and especially those who had a number of inter-related problems. This help desk also focused attention on the families of prisoners and dealt with problems that they encountered. The most common family-related problems for the help desks were firstly, how to ensure that children received adequate care and protection when one, or sometimes the only, or sometimes both parent(s) were in prison. Secondly, there were certain social and psychological problems that had to be resolved when families were reunited after one of their members - a parent, a son or a daughter – had been released from prison.

In addition, thanks to the DP, some centres offering assistance and counselling to ex-offenders were opened in various local communities. The majority of these are in Turin and last year more than 700 people used these centres. The enquiries were very varied, as they ranged from a young offender who had recently move to Turin and needed advice about finding a doctor to an 80 year old ex-prisoner who wanted help to meet his and his wife’s outstanding debts for heating and refuse collection that totalled more that 2.500 Euro.

THE OUTCOMES AND RESULTS OF CAR.TE.S.I.O.

Project outcomes in quantitative terms are summarised in the table below.

| Project Beneficiaries i.e. Prisoners and Ex-Offenders on an “Insertion Plan” | | |
|---|---------------|---------------------|
| Projected Number | Actual Number | Number with a Stage |
| 120 | 235 | 133 |
| Project Beneficiaries offered Housing and other forms of Logistical Support | | |
| Projected Number | Actual Number | |
| 50 | 73 | |
| Operators taking part in Inter-Professional Training | | |
| Projected Number | Actual Number | |
| 80 | 400 | |

However, it is also useful to look at a couple of stories behind the hard facts in this table, which help to explain the effects of the project on the lives of an ex-offender and the local community around one prison.

Renato had a sentence for drug dealing and inside the prison in Fossano, he attended a vocational training course on factory automation. Through the DP, he was able to leave the prison during the day to work for a little firm in Alba, another town in Piedmont. He feels *that “thanks to the vocational training I got in the jail and to the support of my tutor, I became part of the firm, without too many difficulties, even if I hadn’t been working for several years.”* However, his wife and daughter didn’t live in Piedmont but the operators involved in the project were able to assist them to find a house and the family was reunited on Renato’s release. He says *“without this help for me and many others like me, integration would have been much more difficult. The most important thing was to feel confident in the support of my tutor who followed me every step of the way.”*



The villa given to the project by the Municipality of Verbania

Verbania is a small city in the north east of Piedmont and the prison has less than one hundred prisoners. Most of them have drug related problems and so their prison terms are relatively short. The network that Car.Te.S.I.O. created between local operators and services meant that many prisoners could work outside in companies and municipal projects. The GOL also set up sheltered accommodation for homeless people or those living away from their family. The municipality was so impressed with the results of the DP that it offered the use of a very nice “villa” so that a restaurant could be established. The name of the restaurant is a clever play on words. It is the “Gatta Buia” (the Dark Cat) and a black cat is used as its emblem or logo but, in Italy,

Gattabuia is also a slang word for jail or prison.

The establishing of the restaurant led to the idea of providing an outside catering service and both of these initiatives are now in full swing. The restaurant is open in the evening for families or for organised groups and it is now possible to book the catering service to provide the food for parties or any special meals held in homes or offices. These initiatives have more than ten prisoners who work as chefs and they are also, supported by other volunteers, social workers and local associations.

Waiting in the Gatta Buia for the customers to arrive



MAINSTREAMING

The DP was constructed in a way that maximised the chances of its model being mainstreamed throughout the Region of Piedmont. One of the most important players in this respect was Regional Office of PRAP that is the National Department for Prison Administration as, in effect, PRAP brought on board the managers and staff of all the 13 penal institutions and all the other offices and agencies concerned with the administration of the criminal justice system in Piedmont. The Regional Confederation of Cooperatives (Confcooperative) also had a very important role to play in raising the awareness of employers because without the continued support of enterprises and cooperatives, it would have been impossible to sustain the success of the model.

The model developed by Car.Te.S.I.O. that includes, local coordination with GOLs and the training of operators, vocational training and “stages”, support for housing and information desks in all prisons has now become known as the Piedmont model.

At provincial level, the direct involvement of the authorities in each of the GOLs has helped to ensure that these networks have a role to play in policy development. Recognising the value of the GOLs, the Provinces have taken on the role of coordination and are providing their Secretariat, except in the case of the Province of Vercelli. In a sense, the process of mainstreaming has been entrusted to the GOLs and the quality of their partnerships with all the

local actors. They are the carriers of the DP's message and its good practices throughout their local areas and, by working together, throughout all of the Piedmont Region. Similarly, Confcooperative is seen as the main vector for raising the awareness of enterprises and for passing on the good practices that have emerged in the employment of ex-offenders.

At a regional level, the POR or Regional Operational Plan that is specifically concerned with social inclusion has adopted completely the DP's approaches and methods in its references to future provision for prisoners and ex-offenders. Also, at Regional level, it is intended to use the results of Car.Te.S.I.O. throughout the whole of the territory to promote the successful integration of other disadvantaged groups. In this context, the EQUAL DP began to be a co-planner with the Region in its use of the public resources such as the funds available for the Regional Operative Plan and those that were allocated for vocational training.

At a national level, the development and mainstreaming of the project has been closely followed by the Government's Department for Prison Administration and by ISFOL, the National Support Structure for the EQUAL Community Initiative, with a view to the possible use of its methods in other regional settings.

There have been some recent, very important developments in the region. The DPs model has now been incorporated within the framework of a new agreement between the Department of Prison Administration and Piedmont Region. Then, in 2005, the Piedmont Region passed new legislation that recognises and strengthens the position of the GOLs and regulates their activities. From now on, any local initiative for this specific target group of offenders will have to be proposed, arranged and validated through the GOL responsible for that local area. Any regional financing and contributions in relation to welfare policies, vocational integration and vocational training, under Regional Laws 1, 45 and 28, will similarly require the approval of the GOLs.

The final aim of Car.Te.S.I.O.'s mainstreaming was to create an innovative inclusion model using active labour market policies and social policies that would be spread throughout the whole of the Region of Piedmont. This has been achieved thanks to the DP's strategies and what is more, as a result of the agreements and legislation mentioned above, this regional model is now in a very secure and sustainable situation.

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