



THE SKILL MILL

Innovative new programme aims to get over 224 young ex-offenders into work

- The Skill Mill is an intensive 6-month work programme designed to help vulnerable young people break the cycle of re-offending and gain work experience.
- Over 224 young people will be employed, each for six months, gaining a nationally recognised qualification, practical work skills, a wage and an opportunity to progress into further employment and/or training.
- The programme is jointly commissioned by seven Local Authorities – Birmingham, Croydon, Durham, Leeds, Nottingham, Rochdale and Surrey – with support from the Life Chances Fund (awarded by The National Lottery Community Fund on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport.)
- It is structured as a four-year outcomes contract, funded by a social impact bond – so the provider is paid for successfully keeping young people out of the criminal justice system and achieving other milestones such as gaining an accredited qualification and further employment.

High risk young people in seven Local Authorities can now access a programme that combines paid jobs, training and mentoring that will help them stay out of the criminal justice system and deliver better outcomes for them, their families and the wider community, thanks to a unique collaboration between The Skill Mill (the Social Enterprise delivering the programme), local and central government, social investors and local employers.

The Skill Mill will work with over 224 young people involved in serious criminal and anti-social behaviour, who are at high risk of committing further offences. These young people will be offered a six month job with support designed to help address their underlying issues and improve their life chances. This programme is intensive, based on rigorous evidence gained over the past six years and designed to integrate young people back into the labour market and society.

Jobs are primarily in the environmental maintenance and construction sectors and are shown to improve emotional and physical wellbeing through being outdoors and with significant contact with nature.

Funding for the programme is initially being provided by four social investors jointly led by Northstar Ventures and Big Issue Invest, plus CAF Venturesome and the Resonance West Midlands SIFR Fund. Social Finance has sponsored the programme and will provide performance management services to the project.

The initiative will be operated by The Skill Mill, an award winning Social Enterprise working in partnership with some of the country's most progressive and socially responsible employers, who collectively bring decades of experience of implementing evidence-based programmes across the UK and further afield.



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Structured as a social outcomes contract, The Skill Mill Partnership will be paid only if it succeeds in keeping the young person's progress on the programme and achieving the outcomes linked to employability and no further court convictions.

The Skill Mill Partnership will benefit from management support from Social Finance UK and the Social Investment group, with the latter providing over £1m of risk capital. The Youth Justice Board (England and Wales) is also supporting the programme in a strategic advisory capacity.

David Parks, Managing Director of The Skill Mill said, "This programme is the culmination of many months of hard work and dedication from all partners who are committed to improving the life chances of some of the most vulnerable young people in society. These young people who have been drawn into criminality need a realistic opportunity to break the cycle. The Skill Mill achieves this by helping to change their identity from one of offender to an employee with legitimate income, self-respect and a desire to change their behaviour and contribute positively to society and the economy."

Richard Parsons Major Projects Director, Maritime and Aviation, Royal HaskoningDHV said: "Royal HaskoningDHV has been proud to support the Skill Mill over the lifetime of the social enterprise, working alongside the team to support young people as they emerge from the criminal justice system, and to break down barriers to a successful and fulfilling life away from crime. Seeing the lives and livelihoods of these young people being transformed is hugely rewarding. We look forward to continuing our partnership as they expand their reach and support across these seven local authorities, and to using our own national reach and contacts to create even more opportunities for young people at risk of reoffending".

Ian Richards, Director, Northstar Ventures said, "We're delighted to be supporting Skill Mill and this innovative initiative along with other partners who have worked to make this Social Impact Bond a reality. The social impact this will have and the difference it will make to so many young people's lives is inspiring."

Birmingham Councillor Kate Booth, Cabinet Member Children's Wellbeing, said: "Creating inclusive employment opportunities for the most disadvantaged young people is a priority for all Local Authorities, especially with the current Covid-19 pandemic as we progress to the recovery phase. The Skill Mill is providing young people with realistic prospects in the job market, developing skills and knowledge which will be vital to employers who are building a resilient local workforce. As a Local Authority commissioner we are delighted to be supporting this payment by results initiative with support from the Life Chances Fund which will deliver positive outcomes and opportunities for the young people that are employed and the wider community."



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Jonathan Flory, Director of Social Finance said, “Skill Mill Partnership is an innovative public/private initiative with committed funding for a four-year programme to help young offenders gain work experience. It builds links with local employers and offers intensive support in a challenging marketplace. The combination of social investment and grant that is being committed will give the Skill Mill organisation the flexibility and resources it needs to deliver improved outcomes for young offenders”

Sergio Sanchez, Investment Manager Big Issue Invest: “We are proud to be supporters of The Skill Mill programme providing training, employment and opportunities for young ex-offenders. This is an exciting partnership providing much needed support and opportunities for young people at a time when opportunities for work are required now more than ever. The programme links closely to our group mission to support the most vulnerable in society with self-help solutions to provide people with the tools to lift themselves out of poverty.”

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Notes to editors:

The Skill Mill programme is a social impact partnership designed to offer four years of intensive provision for young offenders, male and female, to gain work experience with the principal aims of improving employability and reducing the cycle of reoffending. The programme has operated successfully in Leeds, Newcastle and Durham and is now being expanded across seven geographies in total using an outcomes contract/social impact bond structure. The authorities are Birmingham, Croydon, Durham, Leeds, Nottingham, Rochdale and Surrey.

Outcomes funding, linked to success in reducing reoffending and gaining qualifications and employment is being provided by the seven local authorities together with Life Chances Fund. In addition, local employers who offer work experience to Skill Mill participants will also contribute on a day-rate basis.

The programme represents an innovative public/private partnership, funded via social investment and with the potential for learning and adaptation across geographies. Grant funding has been obtained to contribute towards an evaluation. It is hoped to scale the programme further with additional local authorities having expressed interest.



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About The Skill Mill

Established in 2013, The Skill Mill is a multi-award-winning social enterprise directly employing young people aged between sixteen and eighteen. We employ only ex-offenders, actively reducing reoffending whilst increasing engagement, participation, employability and educational levels of the young people to increase their life chances. The young people also undertake accredited training and achieve a nationally recognised qualification (Level 2 AQA in Employability Skills). They acquire knowledge and skills by working alongside local private contractors and partners. Follow on employment opportunities with partner organisations and the wider labour market are sought for each employee and support towards this goal is provided from the outset.

About Social Finance

Social Finance is a not-for-profit organisation that partners with the government, the social sector and the financial community to find better ways of tackling social problems in the UK and beyond. Since its formation in 2007, Social Finance has mobilised over £250 million of investment and helped to design a series of programmes, including the Social Impact Bond model, to improve outcomes for individuals with complex needs. It has sister organisations in the US and Israel and a network of partners across the world.

About The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund uses money raised by National Lottery players to help communities achieve their ambitions. From small, local projects to UK-wide initiatives, its funding brings people together to make a difference to their health, wellbeing and environment. TNLCF administers the Life Chances Fund on behalf of the DCMS which provides outcomes funding alongside local authorities for impact projects that use the Social Impact Bond model.

About Big Issue Invest

Big Issue Invest extends The Big Issue's mission by financing the growth of sustainable social enterprises and charities across the UK. Big Issue Invest offers loans and investment from £20,000 to £3 million. Since launching in 2005, we have invested in over 330 organisations, all of which have positively influenced the lives of people across the UK. We currently manage or advise £170 million of social funds. Created by social entrepreneurs, for social entrepreneurs, Big Issue Invest is the world's first 'Social Merchant Bank' and a steady champion of social enterprise. For more information go to: www.bigissueinvest.com

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