

# Changing Lives and Reforming Justice

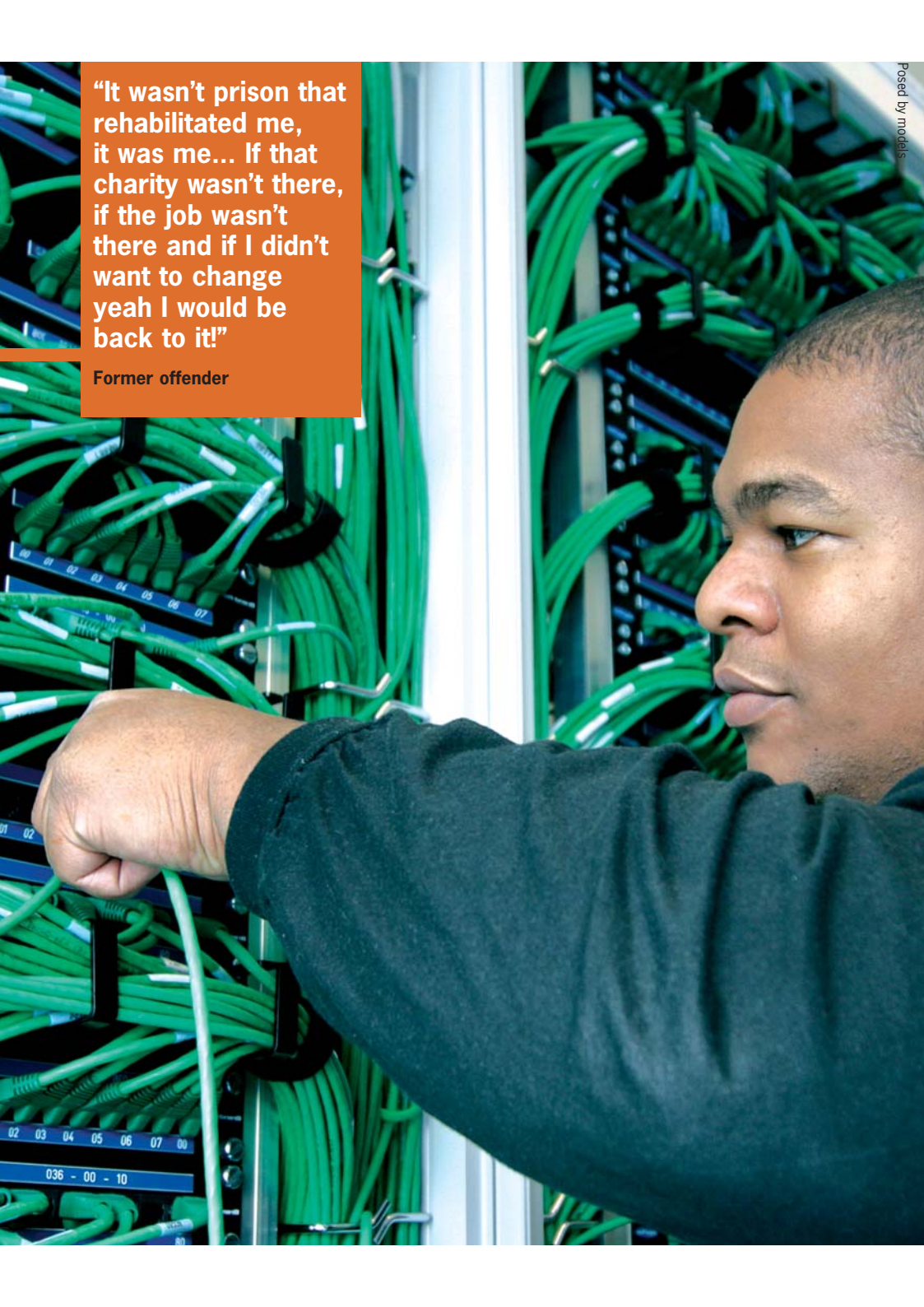
**Voluntary Sector  
Priorities for  
Criminal Justice**

# CLiNKs

supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families

**“It wasn’t prison that rehabilitated me, it was me... If that charity wasn’t there, if the job wasn’t there and if I didn’t want to change yeah I would be back to it!”**

**Former offender**



**The voluntary and community sector (VCS) has deep roots and a long tradition of work in the criminal justice system (CJS). Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) help offenders change their lives and campaign for fair and effective policies on crime, prisons and rehabilitation.**

**Clinks is the umbrella body for voluntary organisations in criminal justice. With more than 250 member organisations, Clinks gives a voice to the voluntary sector – with government, business, the media and the public in general.**

**Recently, the government has encouraged the VCS to increase its involvement in the CJS. The creation of a new Ministry of Justice and the further development of a National Offender Management Service will provide opportunities for voluntary sector providers to contribute in new and innovative ways to changing offenders' lives.**



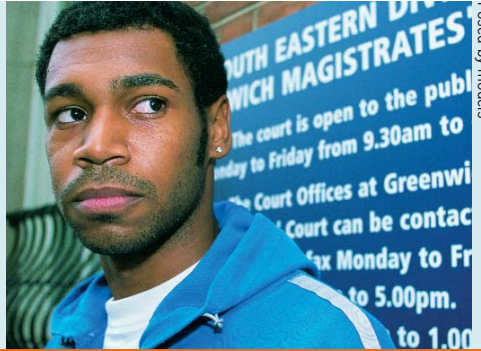
Posed by models

## **What does the sector look like?**

In the wider community the VCS is diverse and consists of more than 865,000 organisations spending £25 billion a year and employing over 608,000 people. A sub-set of about 1,500 organisations work primarily in criminal justice; the majority of these have a local focus, while a small number have a national reach. For instance, SOVA works in a wide range of communities and prisons across the country delivering mentoring and support services. Plias Resettlement, on the other hand, is a small London based organisation working in two boroughs to help unemployed offenders back into work.



Posed by models



Posed by models

## Working with offenders – what does the sector do?

The VCS helps people to go straight and stay out of trouble by offering housing, employment, education and training, finance and debt advice, support for children and families of offenders, physical and mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment, and programmes that change offenders' attitudes, thinking and behaviour. It also provides services that 'plug the gaps', or those that link a number of areas together – so-called 'wrap around' provision, including mentoring and one-to-one support.

Not only does the VCS deliver services but it also has a strong history of campaigning for social change. This is particularly the case in the CJS where penal reform is often championed by a range of VCS organisations whose independence from the state ensures that they can address issues that matter to them and the users of their services.

## Why is the VCS important for the criminal justice sector?

Offenders, especially those with significant criminal histories, share two key characteristics:

- They tend to be disaffected and alienated from mainstream services;
- They often have multiple needs that are not easily met by statutory providers.

Therefore the independence of the VCS, its distance from the state, and its service user focus, means that it is more attractive and less threatening to engage with for many individuals. And, crucially, the ability of VCOs to deliver services in a flexible and integrated way means that they are better able to address the often complex needs of offenders.

Support for offenders from the statutory agencies is only available where offenders are in prison or subject to supervision. VCS services are available before, during and after sentence, and for vulnerable people with complex needs this is critical.

# Key Priorities in 2008-9

**Developing innovative community based alternatives to prison** in order to tackle the increasing prison population and the associated costs. Many VCS organisations think the billions the government plans to spend on Titan prisons would be much better used to develop Restorative Justice, mental health treatment, mentoring and intensive supervision, and other community-based services.



**Unlocking the potential of former offenders** to contribute to the design and delivery of prevention and rehabilitation programmes, staff training and policy development. There is already some good work being undertaken by prison and probation in this arena, which can be built on to develop policy and practice.



**Tackling racial discrimination** to achieve fair and equal treatment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people in contact

with the CJS. In England and Wales, one in four prisoners is from a minority ethnic group, while ethnic minorities make up one in 11 of the general population. The Race for Justice Campaign has been created in response to this, to raise awareness of the inequalities faced by BME individuals within the CJS and the positive role that can be played by the VCS. The Campaign was established by Clinks and the National Body of Black Prisoner Support Groups (NBBPSG), with support from Nacro and a coalition of VCOs. It will engage with policy makers, commissioners, opinion formers and influencers within the CJS and the BME community.

**“They come in every couple of weeks and we can talk through things with them... It’s different because you know they care, they don’t have to come, they aren’t paid but they want to help.”**

**Prisoner, on a Mental Health Charity**

If you want to find out more  
about the work of Clinks we  
can be contacted at:

**Clinks**  
**Head Office**  
**25 Micklegate**  
**York**  
**YO1 6JH**

**Tel: 01904 673970**  
**info@clinks.org**  
**www.clinks.org**

© Clinks 2008

Clinks is a registered charity no. 1074546  
and a company limited by guarantee,  
registered in England No. 3562176

# CLINKS

supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families