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# Ticket to Re-entry:

## Understanding the journey of the Hardman Trust Award Winners

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**The Hardman Trust,<sup>1</sup> a registered charity, awards financial grants to long serving prisoners as they approach release. A clear example of social investment, the Hardman Trust aims to support desistance — that is, a move a way from criminal activities — and civic reintegration, before and after release. Established in 1994, by a prison chaplain working at HMP Parkhurst, the Trust offers grants of up to £600 to long-term prisoners as they approach release. On average, between 60 and 100 awards are made each year. Although still administratively based in the Isle of Wight, most Open prisons have engaged with the charity to identify suitable candidates. To be eligible, male prisoners have to be serving a sentence of ten years or more, while female prisoners, where the average sentence length is shorter, need to be serving a sentence of at least seven years. The most common crimes of applicants are murder, serious aggravated assault, death by dangerous driving, armed robbery and importation of drugs with the aim of supply.**

The Hardman Trust is the only prison-based charity that interviews all applicants rather than responding to written applications. Informal, 'strength-based' interviewing, examining both the past successes and future goals of the applicant, is undertaken by regional volunteers. Assessors report on four dimensions of the interview: the character and attitude of the applicant, his or her achievements while in prison, the appropriateness of the award and an overall gut feeling about the individual. The Trust only invests in the top scoring candidates. Successful applicants, along with their families, are invited to participate in an award

ceremony where their achievements are publicly endorsed by the Charity, Prison Service staff and the local community. When receiving awards, the winners often share their hopes for the future with the wider audience, in emotional ways. Many award winners remain in contact with the Trust and return to future award ceremonies to share details about their progress. Two previous award winners are Trustees. The work of the Hardman Trust provides an opportunity at a critical stage of the offender's journey and therefore merits examination within the context of the wider policy framework for prisoners re-entering the community at the ends of their sentences.

As desistance theory develops, and gains salience amongst practitioners, there is growing evidence of success in reducing re-offending on release through adopting more positive approaches to re-entry. Strength based approaches both identify opportunities and open doors for prisoners on release allowing them to break away from the cycle of crime. Outcomes are maximised if there is multidisciplinary involvement and community endorsement.<sup>2</sup> The successful reintegration of released prisoners becomes nigh on impossible if public opinion results in these individuals feeling stigmatised and marginalized on the periphery of communities.<sup>3</sup> In response to this, there is growing interest by practitioners and academics around the development of community re-entry rituals and 'positive signalling' as specific tools to aid former prisoner reintegration.<sup>4</sup> Examples of informal justice, which welcomes and accepts individuals who are committed to changing their lives, such as the Hardman Trust, are strong examples of 'social capital',<sup>5</sup> where involvement with people and the wider community can

1. Hardman Trust, Registered Charity 1042715, [hardmantrust.org.uk](http://hardmantrust.org.uk)
2. Maruna, S. & Immarigeon, R., 2004. After Crime and Punishment, Collumpton: Willan Publishing; McNeill, F. et al., 2011. What works; een stimulans voor "desistance?" Justitiële verkenningen, 37(5), pp.80–101; King, A. & Maruna, S., 2009. Once a Criminal, Always a Criminal?: "Redeemability" and the Psychology of Punitive Public Attitudes. *European Journal of Criminal Policy*, 15, pp.7–24; Travis, J., 2000. But They All Come Back: Rethinking Prisoner Reentry. *Sentencing and Corrections*, (7), pp.1–11; Burnet, R. & Maruna, S., 2006. The Kindness of Prisoners, Strength Based Resettlement in Theory and in Action. *Crime and Criminal Justice*, 6(1), pp.83–106.
3. Braithwaite, J., 1999. *Crime, Shame and reintegration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Chiricos, T., Barrick, K. & Bales, W., 2007. The Labelling of Convicted Felons and Its Consequences for Recidivism. *Criminology*, 45(3), pp.547–581; Gove, W., 1980. The Labelling of Deviance 2nd ed., Beverley Hills: Sage; Plummer, K., 2009. Misunderstanding labelling perspectives. In T. Newburn, ed. *Key Readings in Criminology*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing, pp. 220–227.
4. Braithwaite, J. & Mugford, S., 1994. Conditions of Successful Reintegration Ceremonies. *British Journal of Criminology*, 34(2), pp.139–171; Maruna, S., 2003. Welcome Home? Examining the "Reentry Court" from a strength based perspective. *Western Criminology Review*, 4(2), pp.91–107; Maruna, S., 2012. Elements of successful desistance signaling. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 11(1), pp.73–86.
5. Coleman, J., 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94(Suppliment), pp.S95–S120.



often lead to far greater gains than those achieved by the individual alone, yet there remain few academic studies documenting such processes and outcomes.

## Methods

The methodology for the study<sup>6</sup> was both inductive and adaptive in approach, aiming to explore a new area by gaining deep understanding of the individual experience of award winners. Fourteen life narrative interviews took place with twelve men and two women. All the applicants had been released, with the length of time since gaining the award varying from a few months to fourteen years. The analysis was based on the examination and coding of each transcript to highlight common themes, with these codes deriving from both existing literature and emerging themes. Six main themes were identified: financial investment; opening doors; turning points in life; positive signalling, emergence of true identity and community reintegration. These will now be discussed in turn.

### Financial Investment

The Trust's awards gave financial support for long serving prisoners to achieve their goals on release. Grants awarded included contribution to study fees, essential trade tools, transport licenses and business start up costs. All interviewees agreed that a significant grant, such as one given them by the Hardman Trust, was a necessity to succeed when leaving prison by providing an alternative to slipping back into crime in order to survive.

*It's a lot of money and other charities are offering like, I got twenty pounds and sixty pounds and stuff, you can't do a hell of a lot with that, can hardly buy a book. Whereas six hundred pounds, you are on your way, you know, it's changing things for you. (Zara)*

Interviewees repeatedly described the wide array of pressures, including financial, as they approached release.<sup>7</sup> Applicants identified a lack of options for financial support:

Interviewees repeatedly described the wide array of pressures, including financial, as they approached release.

*Yeah, the running costs, because going to Uni, it ain't about just like paying your fees and what not, but you got your meals, ain't ya, like what are you supposed to do for food? You need a pen, you need a brush, you need a tin of paint, you need this, you need that. There's all them odds and sods that keep adding up — kerching, kerching kerching [noise of a shop till]. (Leo)*

Award winners saw the award as an 'investment, rather than charity, because you're not like feeling you have to beg.' (Archie). Integral to each interview was the requirement to produce business plans and evidence of costs. Success was achieved by individuals who convincingly outlined what they could deliver in the future, using past achievements as their evidence:

*The Hardman have given me the money and invested in my idea of what I wanted to do. (Mike)*

Despite there being no obligation to do so, all the award winners interviewed stressed their intentions to repay their 'investment' to the Hardman Trust;

*Once I sort myself out, I want to donate something towards the Hardman Trust, even if it's to pay back the six hundred pounds they awarded me, then it can be awarded to somebody else. (Ron)*

### Opening Doors

The financial award itself led to further doors opening. The experience of winning an award extended far beyond the intended financial benefit:

*It's not just getting the money, not getting the certificate, it's the mental state of mind that it puts you in, the positive. (Jim)*

The simple act of providing start up capital operated as a catalyst for change, or door opener, often leading to further financial investment through matched funding from other charities and institutions; 'It was like lighting the blue touch paper.' (Archie).

6. Submitted in full as part of MSt Applied Criminology, University of Cambridge.

7. Shamas, V.L., 2014. The pains of freedom: Assessing the ambiguity of Scandinavian penal exceptionalism on Norway's Prison Island. *Punishment & Society*, 16(1), pp.104–123.

Archie managed to use his success in funding from the Hardman Trust to gain further funding from other charities to finance fully his undergraduate and master degrees.

Applicants were quick to point out that the initial grant actually understated the overall contribution made by the Hardman Trust:

*When I received the money, I just spent it on tools. The business has rapidly grown. I mean, next year, we're looking to turn over a million pound in a year and that's on it's third year. I mean, you look at eight hundred pound in that respect. (Peter)*

*The Hardman gave me a computer, but you know without that I wouldn't have a law degree ..... (Jason)*

As the awards were tailored to individual employment or educational needs on release, the winners felt better equipped to access to the job market and often secured employment within weeks of release, as they had 'the upper hand' (Zara) and a 'realistic chance' (John). Financial support, reinforced by accessing employment, eased the financial pressures experienced on release; 'it was one less thing to worry about' (Mike). The interviewees felt that the process of rebuilding relationships with friends and family, that had been damaged whilst in prison, could as a result be expedited. When talking about the impact of the grant, Pat, illustrated the benefits by describing what would have happened on release if he had not won the award:

*To get me job but I would have used all my savings on the tools I desperately needed ..... and that means that I wouldn't have been able to do my bit and help the kids out and all that, because I haven't seen them for, since they were at school. Now they are grown ups.*

### **A Turning Point in Life**

Award winners found the selection and grant giving process a rewarding and positive experience, which they directly contrasted with their experiences within prison. Descriptions of prison life were generally negative. In contrast, experiences in relation to the Trust

were positive, with interviewees appreciative that they had been listened to, supported, and seen as individuals:

*You can have a risk assessment when you are not there and they [Prison Service] give you a letter saying refused.... But on paper, cause I do have quite a lot of history going back to when I was a young kid and mental health and all sorts, I do sound quite mental, but I'd been doing talks at school and loads of other stuff but nobody had updated the reports .... They [Hardman Trust Assessor] came in person and seeing what I had done, they were quite surprised. (Jim)*

## **The over-riding focus of the application process remained strengths based and forward looking, focussing on successes and future potential rather than documented failings.**

The over-riding focus of the application process remained strengths based and forward looking, focussing on successes and future potential rather than documented failings. Applicants appreciated the informal approachability of interviewers and as a result felt empowered to maximise the opportunity.

*I gave her a list of all the different stuff that I'd done and you know, so, .... Yeah I felt, a little bit -, quite proud, quite proud really, you know..... as you're saying to this person, who has the means to help you achieve something, you're*

*trying to demonstrate them, to them, that, you know, she's -, you're excited about it. Do you know what I mean, so rather than sitting in the interview and say well that's my application, I felt I wanna go that extra bit further and that's why I invited her to walk down to the farm, even through all the mess and stuff and the manure and that and I took her to the yard and then, you know, showed her what the job was ..... She never mentioned, she never even said can I go down there and stuff. I just, I actually invited her. (Bob)*

All interviewees showed self-motivation and described being granted an award as a significant event or turning point in their lives. Having a strengths-based approach to the interview, which Chris described as 'an emotional experience', 'gives you a chance to show them face to face' (Zara). Being successful and gaining

an award, applicants suggested, marked the start of a new, positive stage of their lives:

*... getting this Award, was like amazing, it was, and the staff they were proud of me as well. I remember the staff saying, you know, mate, not many people get The Hardman Trust Award. (Pete)*

Only top scoring applicants win financial backing from the Hardman Trust. Winning an award within this competitive process clearly meant a lot to each applicant:

*You know it is not an easy award to get and so that's what makes it more valuable to me. (Bob)*

Some interviewees obsessed about the success rates:

*How many people get turned down, Amy? Do a lot of people get turned down? (Archie)*

Winning an award provided reassurance to the applicant that they had risen above and outperformed the larger prison population. A simple certificate evidenced to the wider world the award winner's motivation to improve and was extremely important to them. Over half the study's participants brought their certificates to the research interview. Field notes recorded that the interview was used as a further opportunity to reaffirm their success. Certificates had also been presented as evidence of progress at Parole Hearings and often remained framed on the walls of successful applicants, in public view, years after release. Bob described the parole board's response to seeing his Hardman Award Certificate:

*Yeah and they were like, buzzing, the judge or whoever he was. He was like 'yeah that is fantastic' and he was asking me about the Award and how I'd done, what I had been doing and yeah, it was brilliant.*

Participants in the study recounted the empowering effect of winning an award. Recognition by an outside body strengthened their self belief, making them more sure that they would succeed on release. This external endorsement and investment by

the Hardman Trust, increased the feeling of responsibility for all to lead a crime free life as a result:

*To not succeed would be letting down the Hardman Trust, the people who had faith in you. (Ron)*

*If I had then come out and carried on committing crime, it would have been a bit of a joke, wouldn't it, after you had been given all of that help. (Jim)*

### Labelling, stigmatization and positive signalling

Only five applicants recounted a feeling of labelling or stigmatization after release. These applicants shared examples of barriers to employment, arising from the declaration of a criminal past. In order to circumvent these perceived barriers, they often used their Hardman Trust grants to set up their own businesses, thus negating the need for criminal record checks.

In contrast, all other applicants argued that labelling arose as much from the individual's perceptions rather than actual actions by others.

*They don't want to mix because they think everybody knows about them.... Nobody knows .... There is no stamp on your forehead! (Pat)*

Nine of the interviewees illustrated how they managed to rise above being labelled, implying that they were stronger and more motivated than the average prisoner:

*It was hostile, but I persevered and in the end, good things come out of it, but I wouldn't allow it, I demanded to be treated as an equal. (Mo)*

Overall, eleven participants had actively pursued careers in which the impact of labelling would be minimised, often making use of previous contacts or entering self-employment. Four had chosen to work in an environment that supported or aided serving or released prisoners, thus turning what could have been seen by a wider community as a negative label into a positive attribute. A past criminal record allowed them

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to be experts in their work, thus gaining respect from outsiders.

The Hardman Trust Award process provided an opportunity for offenders to be de-labelled on release, rather than stigmatised due to their history. Rather than adopting a mentoring approach, a framework of celebration has been developed to provide an opportunity for individuals released from prison to feel legitimatised within the wider community. Application forms and interviews focussing on strengths and achievements provided positive opportunities for successful candidates. By following this through with an award ceremony attended by peers, family and the wider community, the Trust facilitated an opportunity both for redemption and reintegration back into society. Award winners who attended the ceremony felt de-stigmatised and like a 'normal' person again or as Bob described it, simply 'me, a man in a suit'. Academics describe this as '*desistance signalling*', and have been vocal in calling for a move away from the traditional risk assessment and an over dependency on rehabilitation programmes.<sup>8</sup> Research has shown that positive signalling, like that achieved by the Hardman Trust, comes at a relatively small cost but with significant potential: increased access to employment; acceptance in the local community and buy in from the local community.

### Life Narratives and True Identities

Over the longer term, winning the Hardman Award helped to frame the development of a new life narrative which placed applicants' crimes firmly in the past, allowing their '*true identities*' to emerge and allowing them to give back to society. Like the generative script identified by Maruna,<sup>9</sup> all of the interviewees talked frequently about the need to repay society and 'make good'. Evidence of this significant change in their lives, was used by Award Winners to reaffirm that there would be no turning back to the life of crime as they now at too much as individual to lose.

At the most simple level, all applicants identified not committing further crime as the most visible example that they had successfully transformed into a better person who was contributing to society:

*I think every day that I don't offend I'm giving something back. Every day I stay out of the dark side of life, I'm giving something back.*  
(Leo)

Rebuilding relationships and providing for families legitimately was equally important to all those interviewed. For example:

*I'm a family man, my kids don't think I am an ass anymore.* (Pat)

Seven of the interviewees identified the wish to lead a simple, trouble free life, one that Appleton<sup>10</sup> describes as an 'ordinary life' in her study of released lifers:

*I don't want a flash car, I only want a reliable car, what's the point in having two cars, I used to have a motorbike, fantastic but yeah, it's kind of like, they're material things I no longer need and it's kind of try to be a family man and a provider, do as much as I can, By doing the training*

*[funded by Hardman Trust] that can give me a better wage packet for that.* (Ron)

Four of the successful applicants illustrated the transformation in their lives from prisoner to employment within the criminal justice sector while Three others were completing education or developing their careers with the hope of giving back to society in the future.

### Community Reintegration and the 'Ready Brek' Glow

The journey of a Hardman Trust Award Winner allowed the creation of strong relationships and an enduring community. Award winners felt invited into a

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8. Bushway, S. & Apel, R., 2012. A Signalling Perspective on Employment Based Reentry Programming. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 11(1), pp.21–46; Maruna, S., 2011. Reentry as a right of passage. *Punishment and Society*, 13(1), pp.3–28; Maruna, S., 2012. Elements of successful desistance signaling. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 11(1), pp.73–86.
9. Maruna, S., 2010. *Making Good* 6th ed., Washington: American Psychological Association.
10. Appleton, C., 2010. *Life after Life Imprisonment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

safe and supportive environment that recognised their achievements. Community friendships<sup>11</sup> grew between the applicant and charity personnel. Award Winners repeatedly interacted with the Trust from initial application through to returning as the 'expert' to subsequent award ceremonies. This allowed friendships to grow between individuals who would not necessarily have been brought together otherwise and remained significant in the minds of applicants.

*There is something about somebody else, who you don't see twenty four seven, who says yes... People from the outside, who could have been influenced by the media, the Daily Mail, but they have seen that you are special. People don't realise what the effect is of somebody from totally outside and saying yes to a prisoner. They don't realise the effect that has. Part of the reason why I am getting to where I am today is because that confidence stays with you always, at award ceremonies, at meetings, in college.... (Judy)*

In fact, even the Hardman Trust, itself, developed its own unique, and special, personality in the minds of the applicants. When asked to describe their experiences with the Hardman Trust, the interviewees gave the Trust: a distinct persona:

*It's alive, it really is. (Jason)*

*I was kinda fighting on my own to do this thing that I wanted and then, like, all of a sudden, I've got an ally standing next to me. Do you know what I mean? The Hardman Trust was next to me, like, backing me up as well. (Archie)*

The visible endorsement received by Award Winners had an extremely positive effect that endured beyond the initial award ceremony. It appeared to strengthen confidence further and thus motivate themselves to step out each day and pursue their dreams.

*It gives you belief. It gives you trust that people do believe in you, to have someone that you feel was behind you ... it gives you trust that people do believe you and someone actually looks at you and says, yeah, I think this person is right for change now. (John)*

This phenomenon felt like a kind of 'Ready Brek' glow: In the same way that the child in the 1970's television advertisement is set up for the day by being given a nourishing warm breakfast, an award winner of the Hardman Trust can face the world with increased resilience and protection from the elements.

## Conclusions

It can be concluded that gaining an award from the Hardman Trust, delivers far more than the initial financial expectations. Receiving an award provides an enabling environment for prisoner re-entry, where positive achievement and individual potential are recognised and formally celebrated. The Hardman Trust provides an opportunity, through interaction, for the building of relationships in a welcoming community allowing community friendships and the emergence, in Award Winners, of a greater sense of self-belief, resilience and determination (the Ready Brek 'glow').

There is relatively little research on the charities, such as the Hardman Trust, and their impact on prisoner re-entry to the community on release. While this study was relatively small-scale, the findings from this case study illustrate the ways that social investment can, through community involvement and commitment, bridge existing criminal justice silos and structure a future away from crime for individuals leaving prison. The Hardman Trust seems to exemplify good practice, illustrating how supportive, positive interactions with an outside agency engaging in community friendship can lead to successful reintegration and desistance from crime.

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11. Armstrong, R. & Ludlow, A., forthcoming, *Educational partnerships between universities and prisons: How learning together can be individually, institutionally and socially transformative*. Prison Service Journal.