

Release and Resettlement: Housing and employment

What can a prisoner do if s/he has lost his/her accommodation and needs to find somewhere to live on release?

Start working on it as soon as possible. Making applications, and waiting for decisions can take many months – it is never too early to start applying. There may be someone at the prison who can provide lists of housing providers, eg. a resettlement centre or the probation department, but it will be up to the prisoner to do most of the legwork and contact organisations and fill in the forms. NACRO have a resettlement helpline (0800 0181 259) who will be able to provide lists of housing providers locally. It can take a long time to secure suitable housing, and so it may be necessary for a newly released prisoner to live in a hostel temporarily. It can take several days to secure a hostel place, so the prisoner really needs to start making enquiries well before their release date if they do not have anywhere to live when they leave.

What if s/he will be looking after children?

The prisoner will need to contact their local council before release and they should arrange housing if possible, but if the council are not able to offer housing s/he will need to go to the council's homeless persons' unit with proof that s/he is caring for the children (eg child benefit book) and proof that s/he has just been released from prison. It may be necessary for the family to be housed in a bed and breakfast or hostel until a suitable home becomes available. It is possible the council will refuse to house people with rent arrears or an anti social behaviour order against them. They may offer to refer the person to Social Services for them to try and find accommodation. If the council cannot help, the prisoner should contact a housing advice agency such as Shelterline (0808 800 4444)

What about employment after prison?

As with housing, it is never too soon for a prisoner to start thinking about this. Every prison has an education department and it is possible for prisoners to take courses

leading to professional qualifications. Some prisons also have workshops, gardens or farms where prisoners can get some practical experience and qualifications such as NVQs. Correspondence courses are usually possible, too. There will also be prison officers who have been trained to give advice on job seeking, and there may be job clubs and courses. Some prisoners may be eligible, towards the end of their sentence, for release on temporary licence to attend college or work experience.

While finding work is harder for someone with a criminal record, it is not necessarily impossible. NACRO advises including a covering letter with applications explaining the circumstances behind a conviction and reassuring the prospective employer that offending is now behind them. Volunteering is another way for an ex-prisoner to build up experience, gain confidence and references.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

Under this act, most offences become "spent" after a period of time, meaning that they do not have to be declared if a prospective employer asks. The time it takes for a conviction to become spent depends on the sentence and the person's age when convicted. It does not depend on the offence itself. If s/he served a custodial sentence of 6 months or less the conviction is spent in 7 years if 18 or over when convicted, or 3 and a half years if 17 or under; if the sentence was 6 months to 2 and a half years, the conviction is spent after 10 years for adults and 5 years for those 17 and under. Sentences of more than 2 and a half years are never spent.

There are some professions and workplaces which are exempt from the act, meaning that even spent convictions would have to be declared. Examples of these are the medical profession (doctors, dentists, nurses, osteopaths etc) accountancy, banking, any work with people under the age of 18, taxi drivers and work within the criminal justice system (eg police, justice

clerk, probation officer, prison officer, traffic warden).

Free and confidential advice about employment matters is available from Job Check on 0870 608 4567.

If I want to apply for a job that requires a police check, will the fact that my partner has a conviction go against me?

No, they only will be checking your personal record, not anyone else's.

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