



Leeds Prison, where the resettlement wing was set up in 2011. Photo: Prisoninfo

last ten years of his life in and out of prison. “My first time in prison was for theft of a mountain bike and a couple of assaults.”

The owners of the bike shop found him on the other side of town, assaulted him, dragged him into their van and dropped him at the local police station. “I was withdrawing from heroin at the time so I was remanded straight away.”

He spent two weeks in prison and was then released on a drugs order. After failing to turn up to his drugs meetings he was re-arrested and sent back to prison.

But next month Sulich will have spent his first two full years out of prison for ten years. He has served the last 18 months of his current sentence on the outside and is presently employed at Haworth Scouring full time, a job he received through Leeds Prison after proving himself to be someone who wanted to make a positive change.

“I was inside for robbery and possession of an offensive weapon, I had a four year sentence and I was being maintained on methadone. A prisoner called Richard used to call at my cell in the morning and we’d have a brew together.”

On his release Richard put Sulich forward for his cleaning job in the resettlement department and it was here he met Steven Freer, the resettlement manager at the prison, who helped Sulich break the negative cycle and turn his life around. “I had asked Tadge’s predecessor to identify someone who wanted a potentially life changing opportunity and in his opinion for all the right reasons,” explains Freer.

After proving himself on the wing Freer offered him the chance of a one day a week volunteering role at Haworth Scouring, a wool scouring

business in Halifax. Each week he would take a packed lunch from the prison and travel on the bus to work, mainly cleaning outside in the yard, and week by week his hours were increased. Six to eight weeks before his release bosses at Haworth were so impressed by his loyalty, dedication and hard work that they offered him a full-time position.

“It was crystal clear he was looking to sort his life out and make a new start,” says David Gisbourne, a manager at Haworth. Gisbourne believes that it is important for businesses to find good employees and is willing to search among people who may not have the most promising backgrounds.

Sulich has now moved further away from his family to be closer to Haworth and has recently passed his forklift truck qualification.

“My first time in prison was for theft of a mountain bike and a couple of assaults.” He has had to be mentally strong to break the cycle of prison, homelessness and drugs. “I had been in and out of prison for ten years and every

time I came out, circumstances would drag me down, such as being homeless. This time the circumstances were right for me – it was good timing. I was released the day before my thirtieth birthday, which was a turning point on its own. I was going into a new decade of age and wanted to make a change.

“I could say I’ve grown up a bit. I now feel a bit old to be messing about, and I feel old in general to be committing crime.”

Freer says: “Credit has to go to Tadge for achieving what he has, as he has overcome some major hurdles along the way.” ■

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WING IT

Paul Baker, governor at Leeds Prison, turned the C Wing into the resettlement wing in 2011 to concentrate on those offenders who received the least attention but who needed the most help.

These are men who receive no supervision or rehabilitation services because their sentences are short, and are therefore at high risk of reoffending.

Baker says: “These are typically the revolving door offenders who endlessly find themselves back in prison on short sentences. We set up the resettlement wing to try to break that cycle.”

Steve Freer, resettlement manager at the prison, seeks out those prisoners who he feels want to make a change and helps create opportunities for them, initially through work experience.

Any prisoner who is serving less than 12 months and who comes from Leeds and West Yorkshire can stay on the resettlement wing, but Baker says there are only a few he would push through to getting the chance to work outside the prison and have contact with employers.

Prisoners go through several weeks of screening and building up trust. If anyone is found in breach of prison rules they lose that chance.

“The stakes are high therefore the relative success of our programme shows that prisoners understand this and are keen to take this chance,” Freer says.

The most enjoyable part of his job is “seeing ex-offenders at work and living effectively what is a dream and knowing I played a significant role in their new life.”

He also feels that what he is doing is making a positive difference to society. “Each burglary costs society £4,000, and the average prisoner may commit three to four burglaries a day. In 2010 it is estimated that re-offending alone cost the nation £10-£12 billion.”

Baker says: “We have placed a number of offenders in work experience opportunities and some have gone on to full-time employment with those companies.

“It’s still early days but the feedback we have had from various companies has been very positive and we hope to expand it.”

A recent Ministry of Justice report on Leeds Prison’s resettlement programme for short-term offenders said: “The Board is pleased to note that there has been considerable success in the last 12 months and that organisations across the spectrum have employed prisoners on ROTL [release on temporary licence]. Some have continued this employment upon release.

“The Board commends the dedicated and enthusiastic approach of all the staff involved in this work, whose aim is to achieve successful outcomes for the prisoners and the prison.”