

Model of a program of work
with ex-convicts and their families
designed for educators of adults

Together we can do more!



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Introduction

With great pleasure, we deliver the guidebook "Model of a program of work with ex-convicts and their families designed for educators of adults", which was developed within the framework of the project entitled "Together we can do more!" funded by the Erasmus+ Program under Action KA210-ADU - Small-scale partnerships in adult education, 2022 edition. Project no: 2022-2-PL01-KA210-ADU-000098479.

The publication was prepared in the framework of an international partnership between Polish NGOs, which deal with penitentiary and post-penitentiary assistance daily, and a German company dealing with, among other things, supporting convicts and ex-convicts on behalf of the local authorities. The partnership is united by working with a group that requires a special approach, which ex-convicts and their families undoubtedly are. The publication draws on the extensive experience of the partner organizations, their experts, and consultants. The content was created as part of the joint work of the expert team, which consisted of two study visits to partner organizations (Poland/Germany), cyclical working meetings of experts and consultants (ex-convicts), and testing of work models, used daily at Partners in the implementation of their missions.

The publication is a response to the problems of educators of adults, which concern deficits in effective interaction between ex-convicts and educators of adults. The educators to whom we address our guide are those who work with adults, especially representatives of non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, people who work with ex-convicts and their families, as well as supporters of the field related to social rehabilitation and readaptation. Above all, people experience difficulties working with the above-mentioned social group.

Ex-convicts are a group of excluded people that society still fears when working with them. People leaving detention centers/prisons are usually individuals characterized by deficits in both professional and so-called soft (social and personal) competencies, having difficulty in finding their way in society, in effective readaptation. Working with them, therefore, requires patience, forbearance, great courage, and, above all, a great deal of theoretical knowledge supported by practical experience.

The model of the work program, which we worked on throughout the project, pays special attention to the most important aspects of working with ex-convicts and their families, to provide educators with as much information as possible necessary for effective post-penitentiary assistance. Working with ex-convicts requires patience, forbearance, and willingness to work with people with special needs. It is crucial to treat them with dignity and respect and to support them on their way to positive social and professional reintegration.

Basic principles

1. **Listening and communication.** Actively listen to ex-convicts. Give them space to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Open communication is key to understanding their needs.
2. **Respect personal values.** Treat ex-convicts with respect and dignity. Remember that every person deserves the opportunity to improve.
3. **Individualized approach.** Every story is unique. Adapt your approach to the needs and goals of the specific person. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.
4. **Non-judgmental.** Remember that your role is to support and help. The ability to be empathetic and non-judgmental is extremely important. Every person has a story that brought them to where they are today.

From years of experience, we know how important the work of an educator is in the lives of ex-convicts. By supporting them in the process of social and vocational reintegration, you help them redefine their lives after the period of their sentence. Remember that patience, empathy, and a personalized approach are key to effective support.

We hope that after reading the material, you will be more confident and courageous, so that your level of anxiety, which tends to be the main barrier affecting the inability or unwillingness to cooperate with ex-convicts and their families, will level off. Remember that it is thanks to you that ex-convicts have a chance for effective social readaptation, finding their way in the labor market, social and professional stabilization that will enable them to dissociate themselves from their criminogenic past. Thanks to you, they can or will be able to find their way in society and build a better future for themselves and others.

Together we can do more!

1. Who do adult educators work with?

1.1. Ex-convicts

People leaving penitentiary units are a special group of clients of various institutions. The vast majority of ex-convicts are terrified of building a new life after leaving the penitentiary unit, feeling stigmatized by their criminal past, and the label of "thug." Those serving prison sentences face social rejection. They experience a sense of loss of relationship with family and loved ones. They face the awareness of hurting other people by committing a particular act, regret for their lost lives, reduced contact with sensory stimuli, minimized direct contact, reduced living space, and frustration of satisfying many needs (e.g., security, affiliation, autonomy).

Social isolation also negatively affects the emotional state of convicted persons, they experience lowered mood, anxiety, mental tension, depressiveness, impulsivity, and depersonalization (in the form of negative self-perception).

Ex-convicts are often characterized by the syndrome of "learned helplessness", lack of ability to make decisions and respond flexibly in difficult situations. The result of isolation is also often lowered self-esteem, lower mental resilience, lack of perspective on life, or increased aggressive behavior. Convicted individuals can rarely count on the support of family or friends outside of a dysfunctional, criminogenic environment. The effects of long-term isolation are therefore a source of adaptive disorders, hindering effective functioning in society. However, recidivists themselves admit that positive social readaptation of a prisoner is as possible and depends as much on the right attitude of the convict as on the support of loved ones and institutions with the knowledge and capacity to undertake such assistance.

Here are some important characteristics of former prisoners:

➤ **Demographics.** Ex-convicts can come from a variety of age groups, genders, races, ethnicities, and social classes. There is no clear demographic profile for this group, as convicts may have different backgrounds and life histories.

- **Criminal past.** In most cases, ex-convicts have been tried for committing crimes that violated the law. The range of crimes can vary greatly, from minor offenses to serious crimes against property, health, or life. Most convicts already had conflicts with the law before they entered the penitentiary unit. Often they were caused by the situation in the family: lack of money, domestic violence, alcohol/drug addictions, and children's homes. Understanding that each person has a story and that ex-convicts may have gone through many difficulties is key. Showing empathy will help build trust and support. „Before you judge a person, try to know their life story“.
- **Psychological effects.** Being in a penitentiary unit has a negative impact on a person's psyche. No matter what ex-convicts say, it is always necessary to include them in specialized support at the very beginning of cooperation. A specialist in psychology/therapy/psychiatry can assess the further path of support at the very first contact. A large proportion of ex-convicts experience trauma, depression, anxiety, or other mental problems. Social reintegration after leaving prison/ detention center can be a challenge due to the aforementioned effects of isolation.
- **Rehabilitation opportunities.** For many ex-convicts, it is important to find a path to social reintegration and help them find their way back into society. Resocialization, education and job training programs can help them learn new skills and find jobs, which can reduce the risk of reoffending. Ex-convicts forget about education, so they need help acquiring new skills or upgrading their qualifications to compete in the job market. Organizing courses, vocational training, and education will certainly have an impact on their social readaptation. Helping them create resumes, cover letters, and interview training will increase their confidence in the job search process. Don't forget that employers are not always open to hiring former prisoners. Education and awareness of the benefits of hiring this group can help change such attitudes, so go out into society, i.e. promote your activities and include entities that can have a significant impact on the integration of the ex-convict into the rest of society.
- **Justice system.** The impact of the legal and criminal justice system on former convicts can be significant. Sometimes crimes committed in youth can lead to future difficulties with employment or other aspects of social life. The stigma of a criminal often remains, which does not allow former inmates to forget the past. As they emphasize - imprisonment will not be forgotten, which means that sooner or later the subject of criminality comes up and they continue to be negatively perceived by society. It is therefore important to understand that not everyone who has spent time in prison remains a criminal forever. Many ex-convicts make efforts to improve their lives and avoid criminal activities in the future.

➤ **Support and reintegration.** For ex-convicts, support from family, community, and state institutions/non-profit organizations involved in resocialization and post-penitentiary assistance is crucial. Programs that offer learning social skills, getting an education or a job can significantly impact a positive future for this group of people. It is worth noting that each person has an individual story and situation, so the experiences of ex-convicts should not be generalized. Much depends on individual decisions, a supportive environment and the availability of appropriate assistance from society. Each person is different, so it is important to match the approach to the ex-convict's individual needs and situation. Regular evaluation of progress and difficulties will help adjust the means of specialized support. To give an example, ex-convicts have difficulties in self-discipline and time management. They should be supported in developing these skills. Helping them create small, achievable goals can help them build motivation and a sense of success.

1.2. Families and relatives of ex-convicts

Family and relatives of ex-convicts also experience specific challenges and difficulties related to the fact that the person with whom they have a close relationship has served a prison sentence. Their situation can be complicated both emotionally and practically.

Here are some characteristics about the families and loved ones of ex-convicts:

➤ **Shame and stigma.** Families and relatives often experience shame and fear of social rejection because their relatives have been in penitentiary isolation. Families and relatives are often involved in contact with the justice system in connection with prison visits, enabling phone calls or sending packages. The social stigma associated with the crime of a person close to them can affect their relationships with other people and their self-esteem.

- **Emotional challenges.** Being close to an incarcerated person can involve severe stress, anxiety, and guilt. Families and loved ones often experience the emotions of asking why the person committed the crime, whether it could have been prevented, and what will happen next. The stigma of the inmate's family is a very common phenomenon. If the inmate has children, their lives can also be significantly affected. It can lead to difficulties in understanding and accepting the situation and affect the healthy development of the children, as they are often unaware of the situation they are in, resulting in problems with a disturbed sense of security, a sense of shame and a terrifying fear of losing another caregiver.
- **Perception of loss.** Separation due to incarceration can be viewed as a form of loss, both in terms of daily life and emotional support. Mutual relationships can be affected, as imprisonment is harsh on the entire family system. It happens there for various reasons, first of all, the convicted person is out of the role of custodian, and all responsibilities fall on his or her partner, who does not always cope with the deteriorating economic and/or educational situation.
- **Economic challenges.** Many convicts acted as the main breadwinner for their families before their arrest. Their removal for the duration of their incarceration can lead to financial hardship for the remaining family members, and this is often the case. Families usually have no savings and even bailiff debts. As for women, they are often unemployed and have no qualifications. They explain this by "not needing to work, due to their partner's earnings and wanting to spend time with their children." However, the issue of hiring a partner is highly debatable in most cases, as most convicts/ex-convicts are working or have worked illegally - due to debts.
- **Reintegration after release.** When a convict leaves a penitentiary unit, families and loved ones can be responsible for supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration process. Relatives can sometimes be an important source of emotional support for ex-convicts. This can include expressing understanding, forgiveness, and motivating improvement and change. In most cases, however, families focus on getting the ex-convict to go to work as soon as possible and forget that the man needs emotional support because he is, for example, addicted to alcohol. The most important thing is "HERE AND NOW," by which an ex-convict commits a crime in a relatively short period and returns to prison. Therefore, community support is very important: support from the local society, NGOs, and support groups can be crucial in dealing with the difficulties and overcoming the challenges of both the ex-convict and the entire family.

Remember!

Families and relatives of ex-convicts also need support, understanding, and assistance in the process of adaptation to the new reality, both during the person's stay in the penitentiary unit and after his/her release. Therefore, they need to be prepared holistically for the return of their loved one, including in particular psychological, therapeutic, and financial support. First and foremost, this assistance must be supported by an interview to learn about the family's situation, i.e. what were the relations in the family, whether there was violence, whether the family struggled with addiction problems, what is the financial situation, etc. These questions will allow the educator to find the answer to whether to involve relatives in the process of social readaptation of the ex-convict or to undertake individual work with the convict and individual work with his immediate environment. Involving the ex-convict's family in his change process is a very complex issue. On the one hand, the ex-convict's family can be very supportive in his social readaptation process, while on the other hand, it can be a big problem due to its dysfunctionality, for example. If the family is not supportive because it has concerns about the ex-convict's release due to, among other things, previous violence - this can cause more harm than good. Remember that the ex-convict's family should only be involved in the process of changing him/her if both parties are willing to do so if there is mutual trust and support, and if the victim/survivors of the crime committed were not family members.



Post-penitentiary assistance

2.1. Post-penitentiary assistance in Poland

Post-penitentiary assistance is intended to facilitate social readaptation and, above all, to prevent recidivism. This support is supposed to arouse and develop such attitudes in the convict and the convict's family, thanks to which they will cope with social life independently and by the applicable norms. To this end, necessary assistance should be provided, including material, medical, and therapeutic, in the form of social and vocational activation, accommodation, or legal advice. In Poland, assistance is provided by, among others: competent government and local government authorities, court probation officers, non-governmental organizations (e.g., associations, foundations), churches and other religious associations, and trustworthy people.

Important!

The most important time for a convict is the period of up to 6 months before the expected conditional release. It represents the time needed for the convict to prepare for life after release, especially to establish contact with the probation officer or entities that may cooperate in the execution of sentences, especially those related to deprivation of liberty.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are civic organizations that act on their initiative for a chosen public interest and do not operate for profit. There are a small number of NGOs that focus on helping convicts/ex-convicts and their families. Special attention should be paid to the assistance offered by the Post-Penitentiary Assistance Centers, which were selected through an open tender by the Ministry of Justice (The Justice Fund). These centers are run by foundations/associations whose main goal is to help the above-mentioned social group. One such Center is run by the TULIPAN Foundation for Resocialization and Social Readaptation. Its beneficiaries have permanent access to assistance provided by a first contact person during the Center's opening days and hours. The TULIPAN Post-Penitentiary Assistance Center provides specialized assistance by stationary, correspondence, and telephone to convicts/ex-convicts and their relatives.

Important!

Persons released from penitentiary institutions or detention centers shall be provided assistance for no longer than 3 months from the date of release, unless the necessity to extend this period to 6 months is due to special circumstances,

such as illness or temporary inability to work (§ 41 (2) and (3) of the Regulation). Those closest to persons deprived of liberty are assisted for no more than 3 months from the date of incarceration in a penitentiary or detention center, unless the need to extend this period to 6 months is due to special circumstances, such as illness or temporary inability to work (§ 41(2) and (3) of the Regulation). Detainees are provided with correspondence assistance throughout their period of imprisonment.

A person reporting to the Center must have with him or her: a certificate of release from the unit (former inmates), a certificate from the penitentiary unit from when the inmate has been in the detention center/prison, or have such information to declare (persons closest to him or her). The lack of documentary evidence will result in the lack of assistance.

The Center provides specialized assistance:

- first contact person,
- expert on penitentiary and post-penitentiary assistance,
- attorney-at-law,
- psychologist/sexologist,
- addiction psychotherapy specialist,
- vocational counselor/employment intermediary.

As part of the Center's assistance, it is possible to support the following:

- covering the costs of temporary housing for ex-convicts,
- covering costs related to specialized medical treatment or rehabilitation, and obtaining certificates of disability, degree of disability or inability to work,
- covering costs related to obtaining an identity card and other documents necessary for getting assistance,
- covering costs related to organizing and providing in-kind assistance in the form of food vouchers,
- covering the costs of specialized activation and vocational support, including organizing and financing training and courses to improve professional qualifications, and covering the costs of examinations confirming professional qualifications.

Financial and material assistance is LIMITED AND DISCRETIONARY! Each person who qualifies for discretionary assistance is required to sign a social contract (individual action plan) and participate in rehabilitation-readaptation activities to resolve his life situation. The TULIPAN Post-Penitentiary Assistance Center does not assist people who are unwilling to cooperate with specialists in resolving their life situation or fail to comply with mutually agreed actions for successful social readaptation.

Government and local government authorities. Post-penitentiary assistance in Poland is provided in particular by Regional Courts and Social Welfare Centres.

Probation officers carry out tasks of an educational and rehabilitative, diagnostic, preventive, and control nature, as specified by law, related to the execution of court decisions. The duties entrusted to probation officers are undertaken in the environment of their charges, on the premises of closed establishments and institutions. One of the tasks of probation officers is to assist convicts in social readaptation and prevent recidivism. This assistance concerns both the non-material sphere and financial aspects. Under Article 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, a convict may apply to be placed in a "Freedom Program" up to 6 months before the end of his sentence or up to 6 months before his anticipated conditional early release. The decision on inclusion in the program is made by the penitentiary commission or by order of the penitentiary court. Another form of assistance, which is administered by probation officers, is assistance from the Post-Penitentiary Assistance Fund. According to Article 39 of the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of September 13, 2017, on the Fund for Victims' Assistance and Post-Penitentiary Assistance - Justice Fund, assistance to persons deprived of liberty, released from penitentiaries and detention centers, and persons closest to them is provided, in particular, by:

- covering the cost of temporary housing or providing shelter in a center for the homeless,
- periodic subsidy of current rent obligations and payments for heat, electricity, gas, water, fuel,
- collection of solid and liquid waste for a dwelling or single-family house to which an eligible person holds a legal title, in proportion to the number of persons permanently residing in the dwelling or house,
- organizing and financing legal counseling, employment promotion and vocational activation,
- organizing and financing training and courses to improve professional qualifications and covering the costs of examinations confirming professional qualifications,
- organizing and financing programs to improve social skills to counter criminogenic factors, especially aggression and violence, including domestic violence, and addiction problems,
- purchase of materials, tools, equipment and devices necessary for the implementation of training and courses to improve professional skills, as well as the performance of unpaid work,
- covering costs related to specialized medical treatment or rehabilitation and obtaining certificates of disability, degree of disability or inability to work,

- covering the costs of special transportation, in accordance with medical indications, or travel to the place of residence, study, therapy, work, especially unpaid work,
- covering costs related to obtaining an identity card and other documents necessary for obtaining assistance,
- covering the costs of specialized examinations required to qualify for participation in the programs mentioned in point 5, training and courses to improve professional skills, and work performed free of charge,
- covering the costs of group accident insurance for persons qualified to participate in training and courses to improve professional qualifications, and work performed unpaid,
- promoting and supporting initiatives and projects for effective readaptation of convicts, educational and informational activities, organizing and conducting training, organizing and commissioning scientific research on the situation of convicts,
- covering costs related to the organization and provision of in-kind assistance, e.g. in the form of: food or food vouchers; clothing, cleaning and personal hygiene products, and others,
- providing cash benefits for the purpose indicated by the body or entity assisting.

Social Welfare Centres. The Social Welfare Center assists individuals and families in special life situations. Such a situation is undoubtedly the moment of leaving prison.

The assistance provided may include the following activities:

- **Social work** - is provided regardless of income and includes a range of activities, such as giving information on the possibility of solving problems using one's entitlements, advice on obtaining assistance from other aid institutions (assistance in determining the degree of disability, obtaining pension benefits, housing allowance, etc.) and direct assistance in obtaining it, as well as cooperation with various specialists to prevent and reduce the effects of negative social phenomena.
- **Permanent allowance** - a form of monetary social assistance benefit, which can be claimed by single adults who are incapable of working due to age (60 years of age by a woman, and 65 years of age by a man) or totally incapable of working (e.g., you have a certificate of severe or moderate disability), and single adults with a family, incapable of working due to age or incapable of working (a certificate of severe or moderate disability required).

- **Periodic benefit** - a benefit addressed to individuals and families without income or with income lower than the statutory criterion and monetary resources insufficient to meet the essential needs of life, especially due to long-term illness, disability, unemployment, the possibility of acquiring rights to benefits from other social security systems.
- **Purposeful allowance** - may be granted to meet an essential need, in particular, to cover part or all of the cost of purchasing food, medicine, fuel, clothing, essential household items, minor repairs, and renovations in housing.
- **Specialized counseling** - in particular legal, psychological, and family counseling. Counseling is provided to individuals and families who have difficulties in solving their life problems regardless of their income.
- **Crisis intervention** - is a series of actions taken against individuals and families in crisis, regardless of their income. In a crisis, you can count on immediate specialized psychological assistance, depending on the needs, as well as social or legal counseling, and in a justified situation - shelter for up to 3 months.
- **Assistance to people in crisis of homelessness** - this includes the granting of temporary shelter in a night shelter, home for the homeless, shelter, or other place designated for this purpose.



2.2 Post-penitentiary assistance in Germany

Germany is a federal state, which means not only the decentralization of the political system but also the autonomy of the federal states. Germany has a four-tier administrative structure, consisting of federal states, counties, cities excluded from counties, and local administrative units (municipalities and smaller associations of municipalities). The state is divided into 16 states (Länder), each with its own Ministry of Justice, prison administration, and judicial and prosecutorial system. Implementing regulations for serving prison sentences can vary from state to state. In Germany, preference is given to the execution of custodial sentences and probationary measures. Imprisonment is used as infrequently as possible, especially in cases where there are reasonable grounds (possible escape of the convict or posing a danger to society).

Post-penitentiary assistance in Germany is provided by both state institutions and non-profit organizations, including NGOs, which largely support institutional activities. It also happens that in a situation where state institutions do not have a sufficient offer of assistance - NGOs replace them in the process of readaptation and social reintegration of convicts. According to the provisions of the Social Welfare Law, every citizen is entitled to housing and funds to secure basic needs (the so-called Grundsicherung). Every convict leaving prison is therefore provided with housing and food and is covered by health insurance. In addition, he receives support from public institutions in taking up employment or acquiring missing qualifications, and psychological support if necessary. In Germany, many non-governmental organizations are supporting the state in post-penitentiary care. This trend is also evident in other countries in Europe and around the world. For example, in Denmark's post-penitentiary system, considered the most effective, NGOs carry out effective and multifaceted activities against the social exclusion of former prisoners. Contemporary German nongovernmental organizations assisting former prisoners are institutions or associations whose activities tend toward close interaction with authorities and courts. Funding for nonprofit organizations comes mainly from membership dues or funds from donations (Spenden). Some organizations also receive court or state subsidies, such as for the operation of nursing homes. Support of this type is also granted for the operation of social housing. Non-profit organizations already prepare inmates for release during their sentences, act as intermediaries in finding jobs and housing, teach proper money management, provide financial support and material assistance, conduct counseling, addiction therapy, and social skills training, help convicts with proper organization of leisure time, and mediate the offender-victim line.

German solutions, which largely prevent recidivism and which could be transferred to Poland, are, first of all, comprehensive coverage of support not only for former prisoners but also for their families. The way to organize various forms of housing for former prisoners at risk of homelessness could also be transferred from the German experience. Some German associations specialize in this very field.

In crime prevention activities, the German state is supported by non-governmental institutions and local communities. This is because German post-penitentiary policy assumes that crime can only be prevented with good results if all parties - governmental institutions, non-governmental institutions, and local communities - are interested in achieving the final goal and strive to develop a common strategy. Prevention is the responsibility of municipalities and states in Germany. Each state has regional prevention councils (Landespräventionsräten). For example, such a council in Lower Saxony includes about 250 institutions and organizations - municipalities, NGOs, local community groups, and scientific institutions. Also of interest are some of the activities of German NGOs aimed at preventing juvenile crime. Noteworthy, for example, is the conduct by "Caritas" of Frankfurt-on-Oder of social skills training for young people with diagnosed criminal tendencies. They can be attended by 14- to 21-year-olds who have entered the path of crime, are awaiting a court case, or have served a prison sentence. During the training, the criminal path is analyzed and life priorities are formulated - with the help of therapists, young people construct their new concept of life, following the norms and rules of social functioning.

In Germany, support for juveniles and adolescents plays a special place in the post-penitentiary assistance system. The motto of these activities is to prevent crime or a return to crime among young people. For minors and juveniles at risk of delinquency, comprehensive measures are carried out within the framework of the so-called Jugendhilfe, aimed at isolating them from the criminal environment, finding them a place to live, work, or learn a trade. For those already incarcerated in prisons, so-called Uebergangsmangement - multidimensional support - is offered, whereby a juvenile can still learn a trade, work, or receive therapy while in prison, so that he can start a new life after leaving prison. One institution that works with minors and juveniles at risk of delinquency or already in conflict with the law is Social Unitas GmbH. In close cooperation with the specialists of the youth welfare offices, Social Unitas offers inpatient and outpatient assistance and offers support in overcoming social difficulties and help in dealing with crises and conflicts. Assistance is also provided to participants' families. In programs offering outpatient support, Social

Unitas focuses mainly on providing its clients with social-environmental connections, orienting them so that they can achieve full independence. The educators, caregivers, and counselors employed by Social Unitas work as extensively as possible with the families of participants in support programs. The inpatient support programs implemented by Social Unitas ensure that juveniles and adolescents completely break contact with criminal environments or those condoning such behavior, and help them get an education, learn a trade, and get a job. An important factor in ensuring the high effectiveness of Social Unitas' activities is its cooperation with a variety of institutions and organizations offering assistance to young people.



3. Working methods of the educator

3.1. How to prepare to work with an ex-convict? Self-diagnosis of communication style in difficult situations

Supporting people leaving penitentiary units requires special predispositions. An educator should not only have substantive knowledge in the area of his/her specialization but also possess certain personal and social competencies and personality traits that enable him/her to satisfactorily achieve the goals in his/her work - regardless of whether he/she conducts group workshops or individual psychosocial competence training. Thus, working with an ex-convict requires not only having specialized knowledge (and information on where to obtain it), a flexible and empathetic response to the needs of the interviewee and the group but most importantly - positive attitudes towards ex-convicts.

Convicted persons need support and guidance in many areas of life. Professionals with knowledge and experience in the broad areas of psychological, legal, addiction therapy, vocational, and other support should not only have the current level of knowledge in the field but also be familiar with the specifics of working with ex-convicts.

If you want to check what your current level of competence in working with convicts is, answer the questions in the tables below. The number of YES answers shows what your strengths are in working with ex-convicts, while the sum of NO/ NOT SURE indicates in which spheres you should improve to feel more comfortable in your work.

EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCES

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Do I have, or have access to, reliable, up-to-date knowledge regarding the subject matter on which I provide support?			
Do I have experience working with people who are excluded or at risk of social exclusion?			
Do I know the specifics of working with prison leavers?			
Do I know the educator's working tools (practical use of active techniques and methods)?			
Do I know the procedures for dealing with difficult situations during workshops?			
Do I have direct access to others in the field who could support me in more difficult situations?			

ATTITUDES ABOUT CONVICTED PERSONS/BELIEFS

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Can I control my tendency to make moral judgments about people's behavior?			
Can I accept and respect another life attitude, value system and lifestyle, even if they are completely different from mine?			
Do I think that even people convicted of acts of particular social condemnation (murder, pedophilia, violence against children) can change positively?			
Can I look at a person without judging their past behavior?			
Do I think that certain people should not be supported?			
Do I have personal unpleasant experiences of, for example, violence, which could influence my attitude towards people who carry out such acts?			
Do I believe in the effectiveness of methods of rehabilitation and readaptation of ex-convicts?			

EMOTIONS

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Is my overall attitude toward people and the world positive?			
Do I know how to respond empathetically to other people's problems without getting emotionally involved?			
Do I know how to deal with my own fears?			
Do I know how to deal with my own sadness?			
Can I deal with my own anger constructively?			
Can I deal with the other person's sadness, and gloom?			
Can I deal with the other person's expressions of anger, and aggression?			
Do I know effective ways to deal with stress?			
Am I not transferring my own negative feelings, fears, and disappointments to others?			

SKILLS

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Am I able to effectively motivate others to make changes in their lives?			
Am I able to communicate my needs and expectations to others?			
Do I know how to adapt the language of speech to a person in terms of his or her specific needs and characteristics, e.g. language ability and vocabulary, background, intellectual disability?			
Do I know how to react when someone is aggressive, or over-stimulated?			
Am I able to ask others (e.g., co-workers, professionals from other organizations) for help in a difficult situation?			
Am I taking care of work-life balance?			
Do I use supervision to take care of my mental comfort and not transfer difficult situations from work to the family and private sphere?			

Personal qualities and interpersonal competencies that are sure to come in handy in the daily work of a person who conducts support directed at convicted persons:

- a high level of mental resilience,
- ability to deal with expressions of aggression,
- empathy,
- assertiveness,
- patience,
- ability to resolve conflicts,
- ability to work with resistance,
- experience in workshop work with people excluded or at risk of social exclusion,
- high self-awareness,
- discretion,
- creativity,
- flexibility to respond in different situations,
- sense of humor.

Establishing a relationship with a person who has left the prison is like building a bridge to successful social integration. The goal of any person who wants to work effectively with ex-convicts should be to help them (re)integrate into society, to restore ties with family members (if they have been broken, lost, etc.), to help them create a safe environment, to study, work and live appropriately, and to comply with the laws of the country, rather than to return to prison. This is a very demanding process because preparing to work with a convict requires: a significant amount of time, specialized knowledge and skills, as well as authority and related personal qualities. Ex-convicts return from the penitentiary unit with certain attitudes and mindsets, perhaps even a desire for revenge, and emotions of anger or hate. Helping ex-convicts to learn about their needs, interests, abilities, and talents, to assess their life experiences and see them as a basis for new knowledge and skills, to develop self-confidence, to develop an attitude of learning, a willingness to change, and to find ways to reintegrate into society - these are the main goals of working with ex-convicts.

At the very beginning you need to ask yourself why you want to undertake to help this particular social group and are you adequately prepared to do so? At the outset, it is also worth accepting the fact that you will never be 100% prepared to work with ex-convicts, and you must always be ready to be misunderstood. You have to accept the fact that not everyone who comes for help really needs or wants it. Therefore, it is worth being ready for many challenges and aware of several important aspects of working with this particular group.

AUTHENTICITY. Ex-convicts are great actors (players), as they prove with their behavior. They can change their behavior in the flash of an opportunity, but they often do it only for show, for a moment. For example, during one of the meetings at the prison, an interview was conducted with one of the convicts who was preparing to leave prison. He was interviewed about his sense of injustice, complaint writing, and quarrelsomeness. After the meeting with the specialist, the convict calmed down and quietly left the room escorted by the Prison Service. When passing through one of the bars of the prison, he suddenly exploded and behaved very aggressively towards the officers, after which he quickly "let his guard down", then apologized, became nice and cultured. Such outbursts are the norm because the isolated person's emotions are disturbed. Authenticity is the basis for working with a convict, honesty and openness are so necessary in an accurate diagnosis of needs. It is worth talking about needs, plans and realistic actions to benefit both parties. Awareness of real needs is very important.

ATMOSPHERE. When working with ex-convicts, it is important to create an atmosphere in which the person feels safe and comfortable. It is necessary to make sure that the meeting place is safe and comfortable and encourages openness. This can help build trust. At the very beginning of cooperation, it is worth proposing individual meetings (cyclical individual cooperation in the first month). Then group activities, such as support groups, can be slowly implemented. It is necessary to constantly observe and analyze the person's behavior and reactions during individual meetings, taking into account in particular his emotional sphere. Through this, information is obtained on whether the person is prepared to accede to groups. The educator, before implementing group activities, should make a thorough discernment of whether the people who are to form the group are not in conflict with each other (there are subcultures in prison and informal groups that function in penitentiary isolation). These individuals at freedom can pose a great danger to each other.

SUSTAINABILITY and RATIONALISM. Do not forget about your safety. Working with an ex-convict is a continuous process that does not end when the person stops using the educator's support. It is worthwhile to encourage them to stay in touch and show long-term support. Empathy in working with an ex-convict plays a key role. However, it is important to remember that what is good for others is not always good for ourselves. You can't let yourself become addicted to phone calls and being in contact 24 hours a day. Therefore, during the first meetings, it is advisable to set the boundaries of privacy. You should indicate to the ex-convict the possible forms of contact, clearly emphasizing that help is offered not only to

him/her and time must be found for each person. It is best to set specific times and days for meetings. If a person comes outside the agreed dates and times of meetings, it must be made clear that you are not satisfied with this. Ex-convicts often do not look at the calendar and watch, this is the effect of penitentiary isolation, where life goes on in a completely different mode. As a result, they often resemble 'free birds' in their behavior and live that way, while thinking that others function in exactly the same way. It is necessary to oppose such behavior, while calmly explaining one's dissatisfaction so that the recipient understands that everyone has a different daily schedule. The educator must also remember not to overstep the boundaries - the relationship with the ex-convict (it helps to keep the form of addressing each other to Mr. - Ms., Mrs. - Mr.). Shortening the distance very often causes the ex-convict to become socialized, which negatively affects the work performed by educators. It is very important that the person working closely with the ex-convict is an authority for him/her and understands his/her needs.

FLEXIBLE APPROACH. One might be tempted to say that creating a single framework will make educators' work easier. However, flexibility and openness to different scenarios is more important. Each ex-convict has a different past, experiences, convictions, childhood, parenting, relationships with loved ones, problems, and addictions. There is a danger in generalizing an individual and "lumping all convicts together." One has to be ready for almost any situation, and for the fact that we do not have the opportunity often to check and confront whether what we hear is true. It is appropriate to assume the margin of error, i.e. the possibility that what we hear may not always be authentic, and may be embellished, enriched with various contents that may not necessarily be in line with reality, and are a person's vision rather than a real situation. Therefore, it is necessary to demonstrate assertiveness from the very beginning, and thus develop in your charges attitudes of activity, and stimulate them to take responsibility for their own choices, behavior, attitudes, affecting their private and professional lives.

APPROPRIATE PREPARATION. The educator must be ready to answer difficult questions about the reintegration process, living conditions after leaving prison, or prospects. To this end, it is necessary to plan the structure of the meeting, identifying important topics to discuss and setting specific goals for interaction with the person. It will be helpful to formulate questions in advance that will provide a deeper understanding of the ex-convict's life circumstances and achievements. It is useful to know available resources, support programs, vocational training or other forms of assistance available after leaving prison. This

is particularly important, as the ex-convict and his or her loved ones may not have complete information about the assistance offered, both institutional and those provided by non-governmental organizations. The educator should provide the former inmate with extensive knowledge, which will be aimed at strengthening the processes that determine the proper adaptation of excluded people to the new demands placed on them by, among other things, taking up employment. The educator, as the first contact person, must constantly improve knowledge and cooperate with various institutions and organizations. Working with an ex-convict requires appropriate training, knowledge, and communication skills. It is essential to have at least basic knowledge of ex-convicts to be aware of the most common problems and be able to suggest solutions. The educator must be ready to provide the necessary assistance in dealing with official documents, obtaining the necessary certifications, and helping with marketable skills, as well as the ability to learn how to present oneself positively to potential employers. Understanding how the prison system works is also very important! Without a basic knowledge of prison units and post-penitentiary assistance, it can be difficult to establish rapport and gain the trust of an ex-convict. He or she may, for example, use terms that the educator is unfamiliar with, stemming from specific prison language. It is also useful to know, for example, how many times in a week an inmate can use the telephone, how a detention center differs from a prison, what a release certificate is.



UNDERSTANDING. An educator should try to understand a person's experiences and feelings while avoiding judgment and criticism. Be open to understanding the person who comes to benefit from support. Building a relationship based on understanding and trust with the ex-convict from the first meeting is the key to success. It is important to listen to the ex-convict's story without judgment and appreciate his/her perspective, respect his/her achievements and efforts to want to change his/her life. By getting to know the ex-offenders, understanding their unique experiences and needs, you can gain a detailed understanding of their criminal history and the paths they have taken since then. This will allow you to assess his emotional state and readiness to talk about experiences and future plans. Working with ex-convicts requires an understanding of the difficulties they have faced so far in their, often traumatic, lives and a willingness to give them a chance. It is important that the ex-convict has a trusted person in the educator, who is characterized above all by honesty, truthfulness, and consistency. If an educator has concerns about working with an ex-convict, stemming, for example, from a lack of understanding, he or she must state this to his or her interlocutor, e.g., "I understand your problems and am very much in favor of you changing your life, however, I want to be honest with you and it seems to me that I am not competent enough to help you. However, I know someone who can make the attempt." Ex-convicts greatly appreciate honesty (even one that is uncomfortable for them). This is, in their perception, important in further cooperation.

Try to understand the perspective of the former prisoner and avoid judging. Show empathy and a willingness to listen. This is not easy! For it requires daily work on yourself as well. The ability to communicate effectively is crucial when working with a former prisoner. Develop the skills of listening, asking open-ended questions, and creating a safe space to express emotions. Get acquainted with the idea of Non-Violent Communication (NVC), Motivational Dialogue, and use various forms of improving your competence.

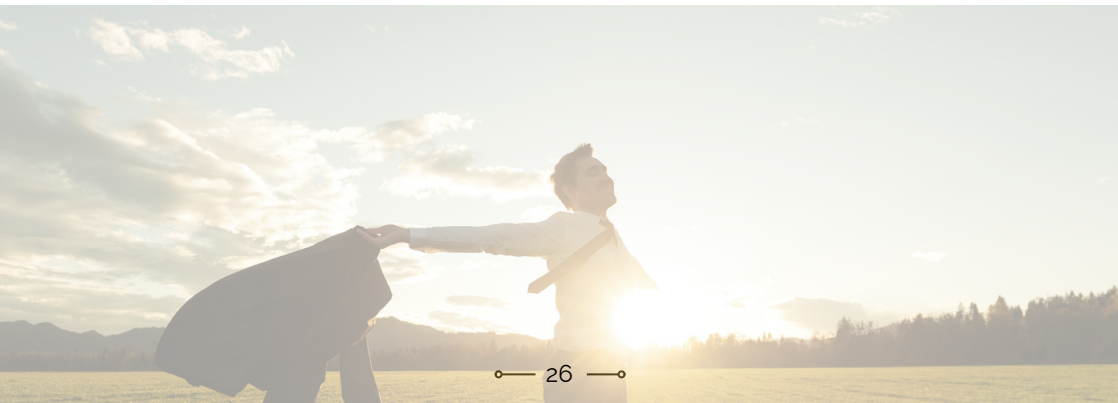


MOTIVATION. The educator should rely on the examples of his or her previous mentees who were successful. You can present how these individuals, through hard work, learned to manage their lives positively and achieve the goals they set for themselves. This will send the message to the person you are working with that the educator has experience working with people with similar stories, which will raise the educator's authority and enhance his or her authenticity. However, if he/she does not have previous experience, he/she should seek information from colleagues who can boast of such successes in working with ex-convicts and present them to his/her audience. However, it should never be emphasized that one has not previously worked with a person who has left the penitentiary. If the educator is asked about this, it is advisable to answer in an evasive manner, e.g. „Sir, not everyone talks about their criminal past, while certainly, several people with whom I have worked have been in trouble with the law". Such an answer will show that „sitting in jail" is not important, and what is important is the person and the willingness to help.

Consultant's advice:

"When working with an ex-convict, it is important to avoid a situation in which you take over the assigned tasks for him/her. To help does not mean to bail out or relieve of duties, but to firmly and consistently support and motivate - to lead to the realization of previously set goals. Of course, you can't get rid of empathy or kindness, because in this way you can only lose trust."

APPRECIATION. Ex-convicts very often have low self-esteem and complexes. This is due to, among other things, their imperfections in appearance (missing teeth, scars from self-inflicted injuries, etc.), poor speaking skills, and/or lack of financial background (money, housing, car, etc.). In this situation, others (community, employer) need to recognize their efforts and reward them with words. The simplest phrases are important to them, i.e. „you did it well" or „bravo, you did a fantastic job". This is a great motivation for them and a desire to continue showing their capabilities.



WILLINGNESS TO COLLABORATE. Working with ex-convicts is not a one-on-one type of work, on the contrary, it is a type of work that requires teamwork. Therefore, it is necessary to have prepared an appropriate range of institutions/organizations that provide specialized support to socially excluded people (it is important that these entities are strictly focused on this type of assistance), by providing, for example, free psychological, legal or career counseling. It is worth preparing the convict for such cooperation and motivating him/her to take advantage of the opportunities for specialized and cost-free assistance. The educator should pay attention to, among other things, the need related to discussing the specifics of using the assistance of the organization/institution to which the ex-convict is referred. In doing so, it should be remembered that ex-convicts have a problem with the proper assessment of the situation in which they find themselves, are often oversensitive about themselves, are obsessed with unfairness to them, and lack empathy. For the most part, they display a demanding attitude, which is a symptom of the difficulties associated with finding themselves in a new situation. Therefore, the educator as a support person who helps the ex-convict should remember to support his/her charge in maintaining positive relations with the environment, showing his/her role in society in such a way that he/she feels important and responsible. The cooperation of society, including various institutions and NGOs, is essential in the process of social readaptation of ex-prisoners, so it is worthwhile to act in partnership and thus strive to create cooperation networks.

Remember that as an educator, you should shape a positive image of your charges (ex-convicts) in the eyes of the public, among other businesses. Presenting them as people who are motivated to take up honest work, as well as to take up changes in their lives (e.g., getting out of homelessness and addictions) will certainly have a positive impact on the way this social group is perceived and thought of, which can lead to increased empathy and help. The educator needs to remember that change can be gradual and depends on individual ability and effort, and that the surrounding community is as important as the ex-convict themselves. It is necessary to intensively promote acceptance and support from the community.

TIME. You can't set yourself up for results right now, right away. You need to be patient. Understanding needs and being authentic supports building authority in the eyes of an ex-convict, but it is undoubtedly a long-term process. There is no way for change to come overnight. You have to be patient, put in place a specific method of working and setting goals, and when, after time, you find that they don't work, be ready to change. The human factor is undoubtedly a factor that generates a high margin of error. The educator should focus on gradual progress rather than quick and sudden improvement, as small victories provide more motivation to work and achieve bigger goals. Any encouragement will give the ex-convict determination and motivation to move forward. It's all about being willing to inspire confidence by highlighting strengths and the ability to express and demonstrate them.

Consultant's advice:

"It will be hard work. You need to be patient and show a lot of empathy, but at the same time not be fooled (after all, ex-convicts are very crafty people), because ex-convicts can deceive people for their purposes. Many ex-convicts cannot express themselves, and for the most part, they can be aggressive, but not always dangerous. From an educator's point of view, it's important to be authentic and not feel afraid. One cannot keep thinking that something bad might happen. You have to be assertive and draw a line that you will not allow to be crossed. Ex-convicts are a specific group - you should be prepared for the fact that a potential "client" may be demanding, aggressive, and sometimes under the influence of alcohol. It is necessary to think through possible scenarios to be at least in theory prepared for the different behavior of ex-convicts. The starting point should be to ask the person you are working with about his problems and to monitor cooperation on an ongoing basis. It is important to be patient during the interaction and not to demand a quick result, and to cooperate with other professionals and, if the ex-convict does not mind, involve them in the necessary change processes."



3.2. What is important in the first contact with ex-convicts?

Prison leavers face a range of fears about the future, and worry about how they will find their way in the present, which seems different after a period of imprisonment. In addition to anxiety, they experience a number of ambivalent emotions: joy (related to experiencing the longed-for freedom), sadness (related to the fact that they have irrevocably lost a certain stage of their lives, related, for example, to watching their children grow up), anger (at the penitentiary system, at the operation of institutions, which, guided by procedures, cannot provide them with quick fulfillment of financial and material needs). Some ex-convicts have symptoms of post-traumatic stress especially when it was their first stay in a penitentiary or detention center, involving negative behavior from other inmates or unit staff. Post-traumatic stress symptoms can also result from not being able to cope with the daily grind of solitary confinement or missing loved ones. Many inmates are unable to cope with the chaos of life outside prison, where there is no set routine. Some experience sensory disturbances related to overstimulation of the visual or auditory organs, accustomed to the limited number of objects, colors, and sounds in prison.

Each person reporting with a certificate of release from prison may behave differently: it depends on his or her mental condition, health status, personality traits, previous experiences, coping strategies possessed in a crisis, and family, housing, or work situation.

The task of the person who is in initial contact with the ex-convict is to establish contact empathetically, to open up to the other person. Depending on the competence or position occupied, there must be an interview about the life situation after leaving prison, diagnose the needs, and identify opportunities to meet them within our organization or other institutions.

It is worthwhile at the outset to answer the question of what is important for an educator and what is important for an ex-convict. Before helping, you need to establish your priorities, that is, to specify why you want to work with this particular target group? What are your motivations. Clarity in this regard is the basis and the first step to success, so that despite the setbacks that may occur, one still wants to work and help; still wants to learn and improve.

Most ex-convicts are violent offenders and victims of violent crime, but also people with addiction problems to alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, and others who have committed crimes to satisfy their harmful habits or to show their power

and superiority. Consequently, most of them are accompanied by depression, low self-esteem, low motivation to act, physical health problems, and behavioral problems (e.g. anger management). Prison leavers lack simple life skills and basic abilities to function in society. They have limited education, poor academic skills, and low social competence. Ex-prisoners rarely have any formal qualifications or a stable job that requires good skills or is well paid. All these factors affect a person's psycho-physical state and their efforts to reintegrate into society.

Consultant's advice:

"Through my years of experience, I have reached many hundreds, if not thousands of convicts. I have only seen real help and the fruits of that help in a dozen or so and they are the driving force to make it worthwhile, to never give up, because by changing an individual's life the whole world changes. Never give up unless you feel it has a negative impact on your health or life!"

Preparing for a first meeting with an ex-convict requires knowledge and communication skills. The first contact can be difficult, especially if you do not know his/her history, or the crimes committed.

In the first instance, it is necessary to familiarise yourself with:

- the situation of the ex-convict, including gaining an understanding of why he or she was sent to prison and what offences he or she committed,
- the environmental circumstances in which he or she grew up and what factors may have contributed to the offence,
- the resources available to him or her - family, home, work, education and others.



The first meeting is the most important, because it is on this meeting that it depends whether the ex-convict decides to use your help. If this happens, you should first establish the purpose of your help and then stick to certain rules:

DRESS CODE. Dress in a way that does not make it difficult for the listener to focus. Your appearance must not be a barrier to contact: a short dress, an unbuttoned shirt, or a lot of jewelry on you may cause resistance from your listener. Remember that people coming out of prison have difficulty focusing, have low self-esteem, are often embarrassed at first contact, and have no money.

MANNER OF SPEECH. Speak simply and clearly, adapting your style to the person you are talking to. Show respect - treat the other person as you would like to be treated yourself (according to the principle of mutuality). Give the ex-convict space to share impressions after the meeting. Constantly observe and analyze the person's behavior and reactions during the meeting, taking into account the person's life situation and assessing how these may affect their behavior and attitudes. Pay attention to elements of your speech and body language to promote trust and understanding, avoid confrontational attitudes, and recognize each person's potential for change. Use open and impartial language to encourage dialogue, involving the person in the rehabilitation process and encouraging them to participate in decision-making. Give the person the opportunity to express their views and feelings about being in the ex-offender community. Being prepared for the range of reactions and emotions that may occur during the meeting, congratulate and encourage the person, showing that they are valuable and have the potential to make positive changes in their life.

TRUST AND CONSISTENCY IN ACTION. Trust is very important, but in the case of working with ex-convicts, the most important thing is to be consistent, because it influences motivation, and it defends against the possible breaking of rules, principles, and agreements. Do not promise, if you are not able to fulfill the request or the expectation of your interlocutor. Set boundaries for cooperation and stick to them consistently. The educator must have limited trust in the ex-convict and protect their privacy. Should you share your phone number? YES, but only the business phone number. Contact via social media - YES, but not the private ones shared with family or friends, but rather the project's fan page, through which you can also reply to a message. It is also important to remember that the educator's role is not to take over, but to accompany the process of changing behavior and habits. The educator's role is that of a coordinator, which means that he or she manages, delegates, and accompanies, but never guides.

The desire to save time, i.e. to bail out an ex-convict due to, for example, a lack of time on the part of the educator, will cause the recipient of help to maintain a pattern of previous action, which will further result in manipulation.

Consultant's advice:

"An educator must not be fooled into entering a relationship that is too close, especially when one is inexperienced, and ex-convicts are first-class liars and manipulators who can use our weaknesses against us. Setting boundaries, and understanding why I am doing this, gives a high self-awareness and increases resistance to manipulation, to the intrusion of the mentees into the private aspects of our lives and protects us from them because, on the one hand, they are ex-convicts and no longer in prison, but on the other hand - where did they come from? It is not a warning, but a fact to reckon with the possibility of loss. For example, in a homeless shelter, ex-convicts are robbed by those who inspire the most trust. Clothes, phones or money are lost."

LISTENING. Listening starts with a confident physical attitude. Be confident and focused during the conversation. For an ex-convict, being able to speak freely and confirming that they are being listened to - is very important. Therefore, always listen to the end of your interlocutor's speech - do not form premature judgements. Observe non-verbal behaviour - gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions are valuable complements to the content of words, and ignoring them can hinder full understanding. Non-verbal communication, or body language, is an important source of information about an interlocutor's mental wellbeing, self-esteem and intentions. We start communicating with others before we utter our first word. Gaze, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gestures, distance from us, sitting on a chair, gait, clothing, can give us a lot of information about the other person. Verbal communication gives us information that the person himself or herself wants to give us, while non-verbal communication can even give us information that the interlocutor would prefer to hide from us.

Consultant's advice:

Be sure to listen to the problems of ex-convicts and pay attention to what they say and how they communicate it (sometimes the problem is deeper than we think). It is useful to ask questions and summarise what they say to get concrete feedback. Ex-convicts don't like to be interrogated, so it's worth telling them at the beginning of the cooperation that you want to help them and, to that end, it's necessary to ask questions; ask them if they have a problem with it."

ACCEPTING SCHEMES AND FIGHTING STEREOTYPES. It is unfortunately the case that most stereotypes about ex-convicts are created by themselves. What is the most common thing you hear in prison before someone leaves?

- "I don't renounce prison, no matter what happens, anything can happen (...)". This is sad, but very real and true. The convicts themselves put a "patch" on themselves as criminals, because if an ex-convict says "I don't renounce prison, no matter what happens, anything can happen (...)" - it's like he's getting ready to go back.
- "I left prison, they won't employ me legally. I have to work illegally."
- "I have a huge debt, I won't let them make money on me. Why pay back?"
- "The last project didn't work out, I had time to think about it, I made adjustments to the plan."
- "After all, I won't earn as much as I would like, it's impossible to live on that much, it's better to steal and combine."

Ex-convicts are "pumped up" by the stereotypes they create and create themselves. We are not talking here about our social perception of their group, but about what they think of themselves.

DENIAL OF VULGAR AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR. If the ex-convict already displays the above-mentioned behaviour at first contact, a conversation should be started with him/her immediately concerning mutual respect and the system of punishment in situations requiring it (consistency is the most important thing). It will be adequate to verbally draw attention and express one's opposition to behaviours that could disturb the relationship between the ex-convict and the educator. The educator must under no circumstances allow the ex-convict to use phrases, words, gestures that are socially regarded as vulgar, offensive, aggressive. If the educator perceives antisocial verbal/non-verbal behavior, he/she should immediately express his/her firm opposition to this type of communication. If the behaviors continue despite many requests, the cooperation should be terminated, explaining this, among other things, the lack of comfort.

In the work of an educator in contact with an ex-convict, the following are important:

- the ability to manage emotions (own and ex-convict's),
- ability to formulate thoughts constructively,
- self-control in stressful and unpredictable situations (self-efficacy),
- assertive and empathetic communication.

Ex-convicts are very chaotic in their statements, often starting the conversation by lamenting and blaming others for the situation they currently find themselves in. During the first interview with an ex-convict, it is important to pay attention to details, e.g. is the person sober, do you smell alcohol/cigarettes? How does he/she look? Is he or she clean, and dressed appropriately for the season? Does the person report alone or with a companion (friend/colleague)? Answering these questions will allow an initial assessment of the living situation and a clear clarification of the purpose of the visit. An educator should never conduct a meeting if a person is intoxicated or suspected of being so. If such a situation occurs, the educator should object to such behavior and consistently make it clear that such a situation must not happen again.

Consultant's advice:

"The most important thing is respect. If one or the other party does not understand this - cooperation will not succeed. Ex-convicts must have an immediate and concrete message that they have done something wrong and that the educator does not condone such behavior. Consistency is key in working with ex-prisoners. They need to know that they are being helped and not vice versa."

When working with an ex-convict, everything is important: motivation, empathy, preparation, attitude, body language, verbal and non-verbal communication - because the ex-convict is a special person, he/she has his/her own beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, generally constantly "tests" the educator and his/her limits. Therefore, the attitude not only of the ex-convict towards the educator but also of the educator towards the ex-convict is very important. If the educator thinks from the very beginning of the cooperation that nobody and nothing can fix his interlocutor then such cooperation is doomed to failure from the very beginning.

Remember that whether you are a family member, friend, prison officer, or independent volunteer it is important to show respect and understanding. Remember to give the ex-prisoners a chance to express themselves and explain the situation they are currently in. Don't judge, or at least don't talk about it! You are there to help the ex-convict to find his/her place in society, not to give him/her an argument to commit further crimes. Recidivists very often point to society's negative attitude towards ex-offenders as the main reason for their return to crime.

Are you familiar with the term '**emotional intelligence**'? If not, then as an educator you need to remember it. What does emotional intelligence entail?

1. Self-awareness – perceiving and understanding what one is feeling in the moment, especially in difficult and decision-making situations.
2. Self-regulation – the ability to control one's emotions, e.g. the ability to calm oneself, to endure frustration, the ability to achieve mental balance.
3. Motivation – the ability to subordinate emotions and thoughts to the achievement of chosen goals.
4. Empathy – the ability to recognise emotions in others, to understand more quickly what another person needs.
5. Interpersonal relationship skills – ability to relate to others, ability to perform social roles, work in a group, etc.

All that you have read above is most often lacking in the people you work with or will work with. This is why it is so important for an educator to consciously be able to use emotions as a source of information about themselves and the world because they are one of the basic elements of emotional intelligence. It can improve the relationship with the recipients of activities and improve personal comfort. Accurately recognizing and reading the signals coming from emotions can influence more appropriate decision-making, increase the effectiveness of solving problems and conflicts or allow you to communicate more effectively with others. It can also help to ensure that one's own needs are met and that the attitudes of others are better understood, as well as increasing the effectiveness of actions and preventing everyday frustrations.



3.3. What should be paid special attention to when working with ex-convicts and their families? The role of the educator's mindset and belief system

Depending on the type of organization/institution the educator represents, he/she has a specific set of capacities to act and carry out different tasks in supporting ex-prisoners with the tools available. It is therefore important that the persons who come to him/her know the scope of his/her competence, and know what they can get from a particular organization and what they cannot get. If a particular organization cannot help a person or family with a particular need, a local authority or non-governmental organization should be identified that can provide such support based on its resources. People who have trusted someone should not be sent from institution to institution, as they lose trust in everyone, experience a sense of frustration and powerlessness, and a reduction in motivation. For both ex-convicts and their family members, an individualized approach, a detailed examination of the situation, and the development of an action plan, i.e. steps leading to the realization of jointly formulated goals, is most important.

Every person is important and valuable in society. Criminal behavior is often the result of various social and biological developmental circumstances, which do not absolve responsibility for one's behavior, but allow a better understanding of the context in which criminal behavior occurs. The integration of the convicted person into society and a dignified life in it is the most important goal of working with the ex-convict and his family members. One of the basic preconditions for successful integration into society is the reunification of the person with his/her family and relatives.

During the collection of the preliminary interview, the educator must ask a question about the family situation of the former detainee. If the interviewee reports that they do not have contact with their family and do not wish to have it, it is necessary to ask about the circumstances under which contact and family ties were severed. However, if the educator receives information that his/her interviewee has a family, it is worth making every effort to get the educator to meet both the ex-convict and his/her family. This will allow the educator to get to know the environment to which the ex-convict has returned and thus create an opportunity to engage with the family as a whole.

Most commonly, these social group are foster homes/foster families (children from intervention) or come from violent/alcoholic families. Often the father/mother is dead or serving prison sentences. Ex-convicts often live in

cohabitation and their relationships are short-lived and turbulent. Usually, children are born very quickly in these relationships and, consequently, their families are taken into social care. Violence, alcohol/drugs, lack of money, indebtedness, homelessness and, above all, educational inefficiency are usually the main problems that an educator will deal with.

When getting to know the family of an ex-convict and thus starting to work with them on support in different areas of their life, the educator has to take into account that his/her work will also involve cooperation with many representatives of institutions, i.e. family assistants, probation officers, neighbourhood officers and others. Usually there are many institutions behind the ex-convict and his/her family, which have a supervisory and supportive function for years. One should also be prepared for situations where the educator themselves will have to take steps to, for example, inform a support institution about parental child neglect. Sometimes, in the course of working with a family, the educator receives signals concerning, for example, child sexual abuse. If the educator has a suspicion that situations threatening the health and life of the family members are occurring in the family he/she is working with, he/she is obliged to inform the relevant institutions. In the first instance, this will be social welfare.

Educators involving the family of an ex-convict in restorative work must have a high self-awareness of the goal they want to achieve. How to work with the ex-convict? How to work with his/her family? Will working with them look the same? After all, an ex-convict is an adult who has left prison, and the same approach cannot be applied to their relatives. The educator has to bear in mind that the family situation and its problems are most often caused by the ex-convict, his/her behaviour and decisions - by influencing a change in the attitude of the ex-convict, we influence the fate of his/her family and loved ones. In the course of cooperation, however, we must not blame him/her, because this will have the opposite effect and our interlocutor will very quickly become irritated and withdraw. Let's not forget that change is a process, so it is necessary to guide the interlocutor through a certain process of 'healing' oneself, and his/her change will bring with it changes in the family. To sum up this aspect, the attitude of the ex-convict themselves plays a key role. It is this person who affects the fate of the whole family. Claiming, arguing and elevating one's own right above all else will certainly accompany meetings in which the family of an ex-convict will be involved, so the educator must arm themselves with patience, because the version of the ex-convict and the family of the ex-convict may differ considerably. They tend to have a different point of view on the relationship, dependencies, and circumstances between them. The attitude of the family is

usually full of expectations, while that of the ex-convict is full of all kinds of misunderstandings, and internal conflicts. It is worth remembering that when working with ex-convicts and their family members, it is very important to understand and acknowledge the feelings and experiences of the convict's family members because they are the key to reaching an agreement in the process. It is very often the case that family members of a convicted person may feel isolated and humiliated in front of the rest of society. Enabling them to receive professional psychological, therapeutic or legal help and support is very important for the whole family.

Important!

Before the educator makes an offer on how he or she can help, he or she should get to know the expectations of all family members. Often, there may be grievances and resentment from relatives towards the ex-convict and vice versa. Such a situation is justified. Lack of understanding and a sense of being wronged causes unforgiveness and barriers to mutual communication. How, then, should an educator attempt to understand a situation? Distance! Keep a visible distance and objectivity for each person. Never take sides with any parties, even if their reasons are more valid. People on the verge of social exclusion often have preconceived scenarios for using different institutions and are flexible in adapting their needs to meet those of others, at the expense of telling untruths or coloring situations to soften the recipient's heart.



3.4. What situations must be prepared for and how to respond to them? Techniques to increase effectiveness and satisfaction when working with an ex-convict

You need to be aware of the different situations that may arise and prepare for the possibility of their occurrence. This means that you need to be prepared for confrontations and disturbing behavior that an ex-convict may demonstrate. Take into account that the person seeking help may be tired of the difficult experience of long isolation and may be struggling to regain independence. The person may not listen to you, may be pushy or aggressive, may be forcing their needs to be met, may be lethargic, resigned, or highly emotionally strained. To deal effectively with these situations you need to show incredible forbearance and patience.

It is important to be aware of potential problems that an ex-convict may face and to support them in their attempts to resolve them. Examples of possible situations you need to be prepared for are: providing support to a person who is struggling with depression and other mental health problems, explaining the rules and procedures related to returning to life after release from prison, and working with other professionals to provide effective support, including but not limited to referring the ex-convict to the job center for registration, to the social welfare center for assistance such as food, or referral to the homeless assistance service if the ex-convict has no accommodation. Your knowledge of the different types of institutions and forms of assistance for people in difficult social and living situations is crucial. Cooperation with other actors is therefore very important.

In working with ex-convicts, it is very important to maintain discipline and kindness on the part of the educator. The educator, therefore, should let the ex-convict know that their person is important, realizing that the person they are working with has a strong sense of fear of deception/ untruthfulness on the part of those who want to help them. Ex-convicts often have fears that the activity they will undertake will in no way improve their life situation. Therefore, the role of the educator should be primarily first and foremost to help introduce the former inmate to the new field of activity he/she is entering. The former prisoner must see in the educator a trusted person who is characterized above all by honesty, truthfulness, and consistency.



Consultant's advice:

"Do not let the ex-convict take the initiative in the conversation. It is the educator who should direct the conversation, not vice versa. Don't let your fear or dislike of the person you are working with show. It is, for example, about the type of crime this person has committed or his/her appearance (body with numerous scars, tattoos, bad smell). Remember that people with many years of convictions are usually accompanied by two emotions: anger and rage."

Remember that ex-convicts often struggle with:

- a tendency to continue a life of crime,
- family problems (limited or no contact with the family, limited or withdrawn custody rights of the child/children),
- financial problems (bank debts, bailiff seizures, maintenance arrears, and others),
- addiction to alcohol/drugs/pills,
- destructive behavior (self-harm),
- personality disorders (e.g. dissocial personality, which is characterized by aggressiveness, a tendency to use violence, emotional coldness, a low level of compassion and empathy towards others, etc.),
- an unsettled legal (custodial) situation, e.g. electronic/ probation supervision,
- "learned helplessness" syndrome (feeling that making efforts to improve one's own life are pointless),
- lack of ability to solve their own problems and make their own decisions,
- fear of space, caused by long-term isolation.

What to avoid when dealing with an ex-convict to prevent difficult situations from occurring?

- DO NOT go beyond your competence.
- DO NOT start with negative messages.
- DO NOT apologize without knowing the facts.
- DO NOT lecture.
- DO NOT give in to difficult emotions.
- DO NOT get into too close a relationship.

In your work, you may experience difficult situations. Some ex-convicts do not have the skills to effectively manage stress or emotions (such as anger). They may manifest their dissatisfaction, for example, by becoming irritated or raising their voice.

There are many tools and techniques that support satisfactory work with an ex-convict. The best known and most commonly used by professionals working with ex-convicts are paraphrasing, clarifying, and concretizing, which help to clarify what the client is saying to us and to better understand his train of thought, as well as the whole statement. By using these techniques, we express respect for the other person, openness to his problems and needs, actively and empathetically listening to the interlocutor. It is worthwhile in communicating with an ex-convict to use phrases such as: "As far as I have understood...", "From what you say I understand that...", "Therefore you say that", "Do I understand correctly that...", "in other words...", "that is...", "please give me an example...", "I understand that this is important to you, but what do you intend...", "please tell me what is most important to you in all this...", "what do you mean by this...?", "please tell me more about this...", "what does this mean to you?".

In your daily work, it's a good idea to avoid the 12 major communication mistakes known as "**Gordon's 12 barriers**" or "**the dirty twelve destroyers of communication**". Remember! What to avoid when talking to an ex-convict?

- Criticizing, Judging, Blaming. Pointing out the other person's mistakes and stumbles not only demotivates and discourages action, but also increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior.
- Labeling, Name-Calling. Labeling the interlocutor a "criminal" and stereotyping him/her through the prism of criminal acts committed will arouse hostility and resentment toward the educator.
- Analyzing, Interpreting, Diagnosing. Diagnosing when you are not a psychologist or psychiatrist - is not well regarded in the eyes of ex-convicts, as well as other specialists. An educator should not go beyond his/her competence, as an inaccurate diagnosis can harm the person being diagnosed!
- Praising, Agreeing, Supporting. Praise combined with evaluation is dangerous to communication for two reasons. Positive evaluations of others can be used to make hidden gains and get people to change their behavior. Such abuse of praise makes others feel manipulated, stop trusting us and believing our words. In addition praising others often arouses sets of denials, e.g. I don't think it's that good (...) thus doing more harm than help to the person being praised.
- Ordering, Directing, Commanding. Some prisoners need an imperative tone, directing them in their first moments at liberty, such as when they feel lost or overwhelmed. However, in the long run, instead of ordering, solutions should be worked out together, without relieving the client of responsibility for taking action.

- **Warning, Threatening, Admonishing.** It is far more appropriate to require the realization of steps by the inmate leading to the achievement of his goals by pointing out positive consequences and motivating him to change, rather than using any threats or intimidation.
- **Moralizing, Preaching, Shoulds, and Oughts.** The phrases "you shouldn't", and "you shouldn't" put the educator in the role of a parent rather than a person whose job is to advise, support, indicate options for action. Moralizing tends to cause resistance on the part of the interlocutor and in no way contributes to building the authority of the educator.
- **Questioning, Probing, Interrogating.** Inundating the interviewee with many questions at once, questioning, or questions that violate the intimate sphere - builds an atmosphere of interrogation rather than trust and cooperation.
- **Advising, Giving Solutions, Suggesting.** Advising a person what to do without knowing the entirety of his or her complicated situation can harm instead of help. Before you develop a plan of action and advice for a person who is taking his or her first "steps in freedom," do some discernment in all areas of the person's functioning.
- **Avoidance, distraction, ignoring.** When we don't follow the client and don't want to know his/her perspective on the problems under discussion, but focus only on our thoughts and ideas we manifest our deficits in active listening.
- **Using Logic, Arguing.** To understand a person, you need to take into account not only what he or she says, but also his or her emotional state, actual behavior, and non-verbal body language. If a person is under the influence of strong emotions, the rational arguments we would like to use do not reach them.
- **Reassuring, Sympathizing, Consoling.** It is one thing to take care of our interlocutor's comfort, to respond empathetically and show support, and another to repeat "no worries" formulas. By addressing the other person in this way, we marginalize their feelings, concerns, and invalidate the importance of the emotions they are experiencing.

How to communicate with an ex-convict who is nervous:

- Allow the interlocutor to talk about his/her emotions (once the anger subsides, a constructive solution to the problem will be possible). Do not perceive the behavior as a personal attack (you can repeat in your mind: "This person is under the influence of strong emotions").
- Do not interrupt statements.
- Focus on the causes of the anger (unmet needs), not on his/her words.
- Don't argue (this will only exacerbate the conflict).

- Control your rate of speech and pitch (by slowing down your rate of speech, lowering your tone of voice, you influence similar behaviour in the interlocutor).
- Don't make excuses (offer help and solutions, not explanations).
- Show willingness to help, treat your interlocutor as an individual ("I will be happy to help you").

TECHNIQUES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A NERVOUS PERSON

Adapting to a nervous person

- You look very nervous. How can I help you?
- I can see that you are angry.

Ask questions that lead to resolution. Use the following phrases:

- I will be able to help you better if I can get some questions answered (...)
- Tell me what happened?
- Could you help me to understand it by telling me step by step what happened?

Avoid phrases that can escalate anger, e.g.:

- Please sir/madam, you must (...)
- Please don't get so angry.
- Sir, these are the rules, I won't do anything about it.
- You are wrong.

Try to turn the person's hostility into a positive emotion by getting them to cooperate:

- Let's see what we can do together.
- I know you are upset, but I am happy to work with you in solving this issue.
- Let's do this (...)
- This is the best thing we can do.
- Please, tell me what happened.
- Here is how we will proceed, step by step.

Remember!

When you cooperate with an ex-convict you must always keep your safety in mind. Be vigilant. Good communication is key when working with ex-convicts. Make sure that all your arrangements are understood. As has been pointed out several times before - be assertive!

Consultant's advice:

"Convicts often display an attitude of entitlement - 'this is what I deserve'. They also often have a syndrome of resentment towards those who 'dare' to demand something from them. For some people, there is an "overemphasis" on motivation, which translates into increased expectations at the same time. Don't be discouraged at the start. Explain to the person how important it is to work together and constantly remind them of the goal (motivate).Very important in working with an ex-convict is the form of communication, i.e. a simple, concrete and truthful message. Convicts will usually already decide at the first meeting to continue working with you.

A hand is shown placing a white puzzle piece into a larger puzzle. The word "motivation" is written in a large, stylized, grey font across the puzzle pieces. The background is light blue and white, with red and green geometric shapes in the corners.

motivation

3.5. How to organize effective training for ex-convicts?

Education of ex-convicts must be individualized and focused on their personal development. It is important to encourage continuous learning and development of acquired skills to promote independence and the ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills in real life. It is necessary to take into account a person's needs, desires and abilities. It is important to find out what interests the person most, where he/she sees himself/herself and what he/she would like to do later in life. Efforts should be made to monitor and track the progress of ex-convicts, their future activities and lives, and to provide ongoing support and advice when it is needed most, and to offer further training and assistance in a wide range of different fields. Personal development should be encouraged, emphasizing the importance of responsibility and self-respect, and positive behavior should be promoted. The importance of emotional intelligence and the ability to deal with stress and conflict is important. It is appropriate to involve ex-convicts in community service and volunteer work, creating real opportunities to help them integrate into society. Social justice and equality must be integrated into education, and creativity and innovation must become key principles for facing challenges and finding solutions. It is important that education be consistent, broad and reflect all key aspects of life. Important factors are the involvement of ex-convicts in decision-making processes and the promotion of their personal development and self-confidence. Education must be constantly adapted to changing social and labor market conditions.

Consultant's advice:

"Many hours of conversations, motivational videos, and meetings, success stories, the development of a personalized action plan - can be helpful and are important, but one must always be aware that there is no way to ensure 100% effectiveness. You need to assume a margin for error, be flexible and learn to let go. Yes, to let it go and give a chance to work on yourself, only to really motivated people.

Effective training for ex-convicts includes several key elements to improve their employability and reintegration into society:

- individual needs assessment,
- identification of educational background,
- verification of skills and interests to develop training plans.

The focus should be on training that is relevant to skill-building and that can be applied in various areas, such as problem-solving, interpersonal skills, communication, motivation, time management, conflict resolution or teamwork. It should also be noted that it is very important to offer and provide training related to specific professions or specialties that are useful in life, in order to help people integrate more fully into society and find their place in the labor market. Ideally, after completing the training and acquiring specific knowledge and skills - the results should be evaluated and rewarded with, for example, a diploma/certificate. Such documents will benefit their future life by proving that we are dealing with a reliable person who learns, seeks knowledge, and new skills.

When you want to organize training for ex-convicts, you need to think about the subject matter, the purpose and intended effects, and the target group. You should clearly define who you want to train and how, for example, the training will be aimed at ex-convicts, first-time convicts aged from 25 to 28 years, who do not have a learned profession. The purpose of the training will be to acquire qualifications in the welding profession. Training programs should be designed to meet the needs of ex-convicts and the requirements of the modern labor market. By taking these elements into account, training organizers can help ex-convicts gain the skills and confidence they need to succeed in the job market and make a meaningful contribution to society.

One of the factors that can help change public attitudes toward convicts is the active participation of ex-convicts in public life. It is therefore necessary to develop activities in which ex-convicts can show their potential, motivation and positive experiences. Any kind of assistance is necessary to help ex-convicts (re)integrate into society, so various training courses are available: legal and financial skills, self-awareness, changing criminal behavior, restoring and maintaining relationships with family members or dealing with addictions. Therefore, in order to help ex-convicts return to society, to a full social life and to function fully, it is necessary to organize training for ex-convicts in a way that meets their own needs, i.e. by listening to what is important to the ex-convict, what kind of training he needs, where he needs reinforcement, etc. However, regardless of the individual problems of ex-convicts, training in labor market (re)integration, career counseling will always be important, and direct cooperation with employment services and NGOs is necessary and inevitable.

Moreover, when we talk about ex-convicts, we must remember that they have complexes and that group training may not be acceptable to them. That's why it's important to find out first what each person needs - perhaps individual work is necessary because they are unable and incapable of working in groups or even sitting in a designated auditorium. Recently, a lot of training has been done remotely (online) which narrows the divide between individualists and people who are able to work and learn under any conditions. We can't change a person's past or their crimes, but we can help them prevent them from committing further offenses, so any kind of help matters to them.

Conducting effective training requires several preliminary steps at the planning stage:

- **Selection of the trainer.** It is important that the person conducting the workshop is competent, experienced as a trainer, and has a positive attitude towards the participants and the purpose of the workshop.
- **Selection of participants – constructing the training group.** Selecting the right people for the training group is extremely important. It is good for people to be interested in the topic of a specific workshop, and to face similar experiences and difficulties.
- **Group size.** Depends on whether personal conversations are planned, touching on difficult experiences (in which case small groups of people who like each other are advisable so that they have the readiness to openly exchange thoughts and feelings in a safe space of trust) or only psycho-educational talks, such as in the form of an interactive lecture (in which case it may be a larger group of people, due to fewer interactions between participants, and thus less social exposure, such as speaking in a forum, which is a troublesome experience for many people).
- **Workshop venue.** Tailored to the needs of participants, taking into account dysfunctions due to cognitive disorders, physical disabilities, sensory dysfunctions and other psychophysical limitations. Comfortable, allowing free contact with the facilitator and between participants.
- **Duration of workshops.** It is proposed that the training should last no longer than 3 hours (taking into account the maintenance of attention in the elderly or the more frequent need to use the toilet, etc.).
- **Form of training.** Ex-convicts have problems concentrating and get bored quickly, so it is worth organizing training sessions that allow them to feel like subjects and thus encourage activity and cooperation and motivate them to work together. It's also worth inviting entities that may be attractive to them, such as a training company that has been working at heights for more than 10 years and has been successful in this industry.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

	Together	Individually
Group atmosphere	When you are sure that there is trust, kindness, sympathy and acceptance in a group of people, people do not find it difficult to be open about various topics.	When people don't know each other well, they shy away from group interaction, have difficulty trusting each other, being open, conflicted, afraid of being judged, laughed at, misunderstood.
Topic	Common to the group (e.g., about parenting problems), with a relatively low possibility of evoking intense emotions (e.g., legal issues).	Difficult situations concerning the person (e.g., when we have a suspicion that the person may have experienced violence, is in a suicidal crisis).
Selection of content	Adapted to the cognitive abilities, emotional state of participants. Depends on the needs signaled by the participants.	

Specialist support. Ongoing support and pointing out opportunities is extremely important in activities that are expected to ultimately result in the acquisition of relevant qualifications. Accompanying an ex-convict on the process of qualification is very important from the very beginning to the end.

Certificates, diplomas, attestation. Receiving confirmation of participation in training/course/lecture, etc. is very important to former prisoners. Given that many of them have a probation officer/family assistant, any written confirmation of their activity is important to them. Therefore, it is worth remembering the importance of this document and giving it to the participant as soon as possible after completing the activity. It's also worth staying in touch with the former convict and, over time, inviting him/her to an open meeting, conference, etc. in order to exchange experiences, as well as to find out whether the training he/she completed has had or is having an impact on his/her personal or professional life.

Remember!

NGOs are often very important top-level support institutions and are eager to get involved in training projects.


Consultant's advice:

"In prison, convicts often participate in training for 'killing time' or 'because the tutor cares,' and this will look better when applying for conditional release. After leaving the penitentiary unit, the support of an educator can play a key role in improving skills and self-confidence. Listen, how are you doing? And we don't say it casually to ask, but listen with enthusiasm, share the hardships and joys, and are there to support, not to say it could have been better. It is the convicts who have often heard all their lives: you could have been better. From us, they are to hear that today they are the best trainees we could have had with as much assurance, sincerity and diligence as possible."

Conclusion

Ex-convicts are a special group of clients of educational and rehabilitation institutions. When leaving penitentiary units, they often face social ostracism and feel a lack of support from both family and society. Being in prison negatively affects their psychological state, leading to lowered self-esteem, trauma, or "learned helplessness" syndrome. Despite these challenges, social reintegration is possible, with appropriate educational, rehabilitative, and vocational support. It is crucial to understand the individual stories and needs of ex-convicts and to tailor support programs to their life situations and capabilities. Social integration also requires a change in social attitudes and public policies to create more favorable conditions for those leaving the penitentiary system. Families of convicts also face specific challenges, both emotional and practical, related to their loved ones being in penitentiary units. They feel the shame, stigma, and emotional difficulties associated with separation and the responsibility of assisting in the process of social reintegration after a convict's release. In addition, they often have to cope with economic problems resulting from the loss of their primary breadwinner. Despite these challenges, support from family and loved ones plays an important role in the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration of ex-convicts.

The role of state institutions, the community and non-governmental organizations is crucial in dealing with these difficulties and contributes to the effective adaptation of both ex-convicts and their families to the new reality of life. Working with ex-convicts requires the ability to manage emotions, assertive communication, and consistency in action. Educators must be prepared for a variety of situations and maintain objectivity and distance in order to effectively support this social group. It is necessary to be aware of possible confrontations and disturbing behaviors that ex-convicts may exhibit, and try to be prepared to respond appropriately and, above all, always keep their safety in mind. An important part of the work of educators is undoubtedly cooperation with aid institutions. In Poland, post-penitentiary assistance includes various forms: material assistance, medical, therapeutic, social and vocational activation, accommodation and legal advice. Institutions and organizations such as government and local government bodies, probation officers, non-governmental organizations and social welfare centers are involved in providing this assistance. In addition, there is the Post-Penitentiary Assistance Fund, which supports Post-Penitentiary Assistance Centers throughout Poland, such as the TULIPAN Post-Penitentiary Assistance Center, which offers specialized assistance, including in-person, correspondence and telephone support for ex-convicts and their



families. There are also competitive calls announced by state institutions/non-governmental organizations, which provide opportunities for programs for socially excluded people, including ex-convicts and their families. Such programs are used by the Zachodniopomorskie Forum of Social Organizations "ZAFOS", which in the course of its more than 20 years of operation has organized a number of training and vocational courses, which were attended, among others, by ex-convicts wishing to gain the appropriate competencies and qualifications necessary to find their way in the labor market.

In Germany, post-penitentiary assistance is provided by state institutions as well as non-governmental organizations. Germany favors the use of custodial sentences and probationary measures seeking to use imprisonment only in exceptional cases. The post-penitentiary assistance system focuses on comprehensive support, including the families of former prisoners. In addition, special attention is paid to assisting juveniles and adolescents, offering them comprehensive support in terms of education, work and therapy both while in prison and after they leave. Non-governmental organizations play a key role in this process, cooperating with government institutions in providing effective assistance to young people at risk of crime. One institution working on behalf of minors and juveniles at risk of crime or already in conflict with the law is Social Unitas GmbH. In close cooperation with specialists from youth welfare offices, Social Unitas offers inpatient and outpatient assistance as well as support in overcoming social difficulties and help in dealing with crises and conflicts. Assistance is also directed to their families.

In conclusion, effective work with ex-convicts requires preparation for different scenarios and effective communication skills to build confidence and motivate change. All activities undertaken by educators should be aimed at supporting the reintegration of ex-convicts into society through the development of their skills, self-confidence and positive experiences, as well as promoting social change and acceptance towards these people, because, after all, **TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE!**