



The Bridge: saving public money; providing a better prospect for success for a long-term ex-prisoner.

An offender was referred to The Bridge, Essex Probation's new project for those people likely to receive a short prison sentence, after he had breached his Prison Licence.

He had served a long sentence for the murder of someone with whom he was sharing accommodation. He had been released to a half-way hostel, but was desperate to leave: he found conditions there unacceptable. However, he thought that finding other accommodation would be difficult given his offence, and decided to move in with a friend without advising his Offender Manager. This was a serious breach, which would normally have resulted in a recall to prison. It was decided to give him the chance of attending The Bridge. He had quite a few issues which more intensive contact could help with.

Once on The Bridge project, he was non-communicative; isolated, lacking self confidence, and trying to avoid group activity. Obviously institutionalised, too: deferring to authority without question. He didn't attempt to solve any issues without being led through each step.

The Bridge staff mentored him in self-reliance and integration. He began to engage extensively with other attendees. He was also provided with the tools to seek his own housing (council contacts, private landlord lists, benefits agency details and Probation grant facilities). Time with Bridge tutors gave him greater confidence in group activity, in computer skills and CV creation. He is also now aware of further training possibilities open to him.

He is now back in mainstream Probation, and since leaving The Bridge, has not missed supervision. He is regularly attending "Think First" sessions where consequences and behaviour are prime issues. In the full knowledge of his Offender Manager, he has made several applications to private landlords himself, and is confident of achieving permanent housing soon. His greater confidence and willingness to engage is noticeable.

This has both saved the public purse a great deal of money, and made the offender a safer, more responsible prospect in his efforts to reintegrate in the community.