



# Evaluation of UKCRF Skill Mill site – Norfolk

Authors: Dr. Katri-Liis Lepik, Prof. Susan Baines

2022

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
1. Introduction .....	4
2. Background and context .....	4
2.1 The Skill Mill .....	4
2.2 UK Community Renewal Fund .....	5
3. Evaluation Design .....	6
4. Results .....	8
4.1. The case of Norfolk .....	8
4.2. The difference the programme makes for young people .....	9
4.3. Local partnership building .....	13
4.4. The contribution to CRF goals .....	15
5. Conclusions .....	17
6. Recommendations .....	18
References .....	19

## Executive Summary

Skill Mill offers an intensive six-month work experience programme designed to help vulnerable young people break the cycle of re-offending. It provides young people with a paid job in combination with training, advancement of job-related and social skills. The young people engage in environmental maintenance services and often work in locations where their results are visible for the local communities.

Skill Mill started in the northeast of England 2013 and has expanded across England. Skill Mill's model is to provide outdoor jobs for the young people who work in groups of four with a supervisor with the follow-on job opportunity depending on their progress.

A Community Renewal Fund (CRF) has funded Skill Mill in three sites in 2022 and this is the evaluation report of the Norfolk site. This report presents the developments and the outcomes of replicating the Skill Mill model in Norfolk.

The project in Norfolk had a difficult and hectic start with a long delay related to the significant delay in confirmation of funding from the Central Government. It was accompanied by the lack of information about the extension of the delivery time. This created difficulties in finding partners who would be able to commission work in time when the supervisor was seconded. Free community work was done with four young people and one of them managed to complete the full programme and secure follow-on employment. Due to the fact that two teams did not simultaneously start in February as was planned as two staff members were not seconded from the Norfolk YOT for operational reasons, however due to an extension to the delivery period it became possible to have the second cohort running from September and a new supervisor recruited by the Skill Mill for the second cohort. By mid-summer the first supervisor had completed the job with the first cohort. The team with three new young people began working on the Royal Air Force (RAF) Lakenheath's base with a paid contract with Equans during the time the evaluation was being done and one more young person was about to start the work.

Initially, the biggest challenge was the engagement of corporate partners who would pay for the service. However, the example of the RAF site showed that in the case of even one large corporate partner who is ready to provide contracted work for a daily rate would be enough to secure the sustainability and continuation of a Skill Mill team even if no other grant funding is available. Yet, it is clear that establishing such corporate relationships is a very time consuming and lengthy process.

## 1. Introduction

The Skill Mill is a social enterprise providing jobs to young people with the aim of reducing youth crime while generating positive societal and environmental impact in the local communities. The young people with criminal convictions are provided jobs mostly in water and land-based environmental management and construction. The work of the Skill Mill is considered innovative and effective as evidenced by a number of awards<sup>1</sup> received. The most recent includes two Queen's Awards for Enterprise 2021 for Supporting Opportunity and Sustainable Development and the Children & Young People Now Youth Justice Award 2021 and Young People Now Youth Justice Award 2022 - Highly Commended.

The Skill Mill model includes outdoor work for young people in teams of four with a supervisor for a six-month period. The work is commissioned by clients including local authorities, businesses, and non-profit organisations.

Since its foundation in Newcastle-upon Tyne in 2013, the social enterprise has extended successful training and work experience programmes for young offenders to 13 sites across the UK of which 3 have been financed by the Community Renewal Fund. Eight sites out of 13 are being financed by a Social Impact Bond (SIB). The current document covers the evaluation of the Norfolk site.

## 2. Background and context

### 2.1 The Skill Mill

The Skill Mill provides jobs for vulnerable young people who have serious and /or prolific offending record, preferably with experience of custody. Young employees acquire knowledge and skills by working alongside the supervisor and other contractors. They also undertake accredited training to achieve a nationally recognised qualification (for example, in construction skills or health and safety). Follow-on employment opportunities with partner organisations and the wider labour market are sought for each young person taking part. The teams of young people work with a supervisor who is typically seconded from council services. The supervisors serve as the link between the Skill Mill and the council services that refer the young people.

The intervention is underpinned by the concept of desistance, which proposes that offenders need to move towards an alternative, coherent and pro-social identity in order to justify and maintain a crime-free life. The Skill Mill model has been recognized as valuable and good practice in the youth justice system in "Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation: Annual report: inspection of youth offending services (2019-2020)". Furthermore, HM Inspectorate of

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theskillmill.org/awards-1>

Probation has in “An inspection of youth offending services in Surrey” recognized that the Skill Mill is a “significant strength” within the youth offer which targets post-16 education, training and employment provision.

Generating social impact is at the heart of a social enterprise. This makes measuring and understanding social impact vital in order to prove effectiveness and improve organisations. The Skill Mill has kept track of its performance since its foundation in 2013. It has had a rigorous impact metrics including the number of reoffences upon completion of the program. By 2022 the Skill Mill has employed 305 young people and 23 of those have been re-convicted<sup>2</sup>. This makes the re-conviction rate 7,5 % compared to the national reoffending rate (England and Wales) for young people aged under 18, committing the most serious offences, in the year ending March 2020 stood at 72 %.<sup>3</sup> The successfulness of the Skill Mill was proven by the evaluation of Long et al (2018)<sup>4</sup> who analysed The Skill Mill employees and control group cohort (age 8 in 2006) from 2006-2016. Those youths employed by the Skill Mill committed 1.12 fewer offences per quarter than the control group and had less serious offences compared with non-Skill Mill participants after the programme was completed. In addition to the direct metrics around reconviction rate and further employment, the outcomes include qualitative benefits from increase in the well-being and self-confidence of the young people to awareness-raising in eco-friendly practices and developing environmental ethics, some of which have been captured by White and Graham (2015)<sup>5</sup>. The work which the young people engage in with the Skill Mill is commissioned from public sector organisations or companies. The work is either paid for by fees from the commissioners or covered by grant funding depending on the site, time and nature of work. For companies, there is potential to add value to tenders for public contracts under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 as well as increasing their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) profiles more broadly.

## 2.2 UK Community Renewal Fund

The UK Community Renewal Fund (CRF) has provided £220 million in the period of 2021-2022 to help the transition away from the EU structural fund programme. It focuses on pilot projects in communities which support innovative responses to local challenges and local need across the UK. The funding aims and helping to remove barriers that people face in accessing

---

<sup>2</sup> The Skill Mill primary data

<sup>3</sup> Youth Justice Statistics 2020/21. England and Wales. Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice. 2022  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1054236/Youth\\_Justice\\_Statistics\\_2020-21.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1054236/Youth_Justice_Statistics_2020-21.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Long et al. 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-017-9365-y>

<sup>5</sup> White, R. and Graham, H. 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu117>

skills and local labour market opportunities, building the evidence base for future interventions and exploring the viability of new ideas.

The program priorities include:

- Investment in skills
- Investment for local business
- Investment in communities and place
- Supporting people into employment<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Evaluation Design

The evaluation in Norfolk considers that The Skill Mill model is already built upon clear and well-established impact metrics that focuses upon delivering meaningful outcomes for the young people the Skill Mill works with. The main focus of the evaluation is outcomes for the young people and the ways the programme has changed their lives. It will also consider success factors for local partnerships, and how the programme in Norfolk contributes to Community Renewal Fund goals for communities and the environment. The evaluation is designed to assess the following:

- appropriateness of initial design
- progress against targets
- delivery and management
- engagement of employers
- outcomes and impact for young people
- lessons learned.

There are three evaluation objectives:

- **Understand the difference the programme makes for young people**
- **Identify ways local partnerships are built and sustained**
- **Assess the contribution to UKCRF goals**

The evaluation relies on the Theory of Change (ToC), which has been studied and followed by the Skill Mill with its partnership. ToC allows analysis of interventions from the problem to outputs, outcomes and impact in a logical sequence. Theory of Change work can help articulate how various options are expected to work and the strength of the evidence that underpins them. It will become clear what data are available and where uncertainties and risks lie<sup>7</sup>. The

---

<sup>6</sup> UK Community Renewal Fund Prospectus 2021-22 Policy paper. UK Community Renewal Fund: prospectus 2021-22. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus-2021-22#uk-community-renewal-fund-an-overview>

<sup>7</sup> HM Treasury. Magenta Book. 2020. Central Government guidance on evaluation.

underlying long-term objective of the Skill Mill programme is to help the young people move into sustained education, training or employment. In addition to improving the life chances of the young people, another key focus for the programme is improving the natural environment in the areas where the Skill Mill works.

Data were collected by interviews, reviews of documents and datasets, and observation of activities and events.

In total 7 interviews on Zoom platform were carried out between April 2022 and January 2023. The interviews were conducted with the two supervisors, a member of the Skill Mill staff, two young people and a representative of the commissioner of work and a representative of Norfolk YOT.

While referring to the interviewees as well as the young people the names are not mentioned to ensure the persons are not identified.

In addition to interviews the following events and meetings were attended and observed:

- Theory of Change workshop May 2021
- Skill Mill national event in Alnwick, September 2021
- Skill Mill development day in October 2021
- Ceremony in Newcastle for the Queen's awards, February 2022
- Strategic Board meetings in August 2021 and March 2022
- Skill Mill Board meetings in February 2022, June 2022
- Supervisors' meeting in July 2022

An extensive review of documents and on-line materials including meeting records, e-mails regarding the setup processes, presentations, publicity materials, newsletters, blog posts were carried out.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The case of Norfolk

The Skill Mill program in Norfolk was originally designed as a program with two teams. Once the funding was approved it emerged that the Norfolk Youth Offending Team (YOT) was no longer able to second two members of their staff. The two Skill Mill teams were planned to be split across two of Norfolk's CRF priority areas running concurrently: Norwich and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk. The Skill Mill tried to get the team in Norwich going but unsuccessfully and decided to prioritise for King's Lynn. A change to the application was submitted and a revised application was accepted. That allowed the possibility to run two cohorts from Kings Lynn instead of Norwich being the primary location as originally anticipated. The Skill Mill representative had a positive and constructive relationship with the Norfolk Council commissioning team. They were very helpful in the early days when Skill Mill struggled with recruitment at the Norwich site, very understanding around the additional difficulties from Covid and short CRF timeframes, and assisted in the application to DCLG for a variation and extension.

The YOT seconded a supervisor in February 2022 but it took several weeks to get started. The application for funding for CRF was submitted in March 2021 and the successful applications were due to be announced in July 2021 as the projects were expected to run from August 2021-March 2022. The confirmation of the funding arrived only by the beginning of November 2021, and the YOT had an estimate of a start date around the first of January 2022. According to the initial information the projects were still expected to finish in March 2022. The delay in the announcement of funding significantly changed the planning activities as the contracts for funding had to be signed before the recruitment processes could start. The potential supervisor learned about the position before Christmas 2021 and then there were 2 weeks of holidays which meant that the processes had to be accelerated. However, there were no commissioners ready to provide work at this time. The YOT however had expected the processes to move faster. At the same time, there were no possibilities for conversations for the Skill Mill with the senior management level of Norfolk Youth Justice Service which hindered the smooth launch of the program and the planning of commissioning work in the future.

The seconded supervisor managed to set up a good project with a local charity organisation Family Actions and a community organization Swaffam Orchard. In the latter the work also continued after the change of the supervisor. There were four young people recruited to start with the 1st cohort in February. One of them left after completing one week of the programme, so another young person was recruited as a replacement. One of them completed the full programme from February to July 2022 and was recruited by Morgan Sindall, a national construction firm. Two of the young people completed most of the programme (left around 1 month early) and one of them completed 50% of the programme.

When the first supervisor left to return to work in Norfolk YOT, the Skill Mill managed to recruit another supervisor who has very good communication skills and relevant background



within the construction industry and corresponding contacts. Thanks to the discussions of the Skill Mill staff with Equans which manages the maintenance of the Royal Air Force base in Lakenheath it was possible to commence paid work there. The site has high level security requirements and it took some weeks for the necessary security conditions to be met and passes issued to access the secure area. The supervisor started work in RAF base with 3 young people in September 2022. The previous supervisor served as the good advocate to the program and helped with referrals. The team was joined by the 4th young person in January 2023. The work site itself is located approximately one hour's drive from Norwich, it means for the team that there are very long days and hours spent on commute compared to other Skill Mill sites. The young people are picked up as early as 6 in the morning. It takes them one hour to get to the site and another hour to pass two security clearances, collect the kit and go to the work location on site. They start packing up again ca 3 pm and the young people get home ca 5.30 pm. The expectations for the young people in terms of work effort have been set very high by the supervisor and such routine has worked well with a strong group camaraderie and work ethic established.

#### 4.2. The difference the programme makes for young people

In the following subsections the results are presented reporting the views of the various stakeholders involved in the Skill Mill pilot.

The evaluation of the Norfolk pilot is framed by the Theory of Change.

According to the ToC of the Skill Mill the desired impact for the social enterprise includes<sup>8</sup>:

##### **For young people:**

- Feeling part of society and ready to contribute to local community
- Increased belief in capacity to change
- Belief in ability to work and succeed in life
- Improved relationships
- Positive outlook for the future

##### **For employers and communities:**

- Improved environments
- Reduction in offending 12 months after the programme
- Social Return of Investment
- Young people move from being seen as a challenge or a burden to their community to becoming a visible asset to their families and community

---

<sup>8</sup> Internal Skill Mill work document.

The Norfolk 1<sup>st</sup> cohort started with four young people, out of whom one managed to complete the full program and secured follow-on job. The 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort has had three young people working for four months and one recently joined at the time of the evaluation and are ongoing.

In the literature on desistance Maruna (2001) identifies that “to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves.” Maruna argues that desistance is a complex and multi-faceted process that is influenced by a variety of individual, social, and structural factors. According to Maruna, the key factor is the development of a "pro-social identity," or a sense of self that is positively aligned with conventional societal norms and values. He suggests that the process of identity change is crucial for understanding how and why individuals desist from crime. For this kind of identity building **a positive role model** is needed. The supervisors have acknowledged such a role:

*“I’m there to supervise them and I see myself as a positive role model to them and it’s really important to me not to ask them to do anything I wouldn’t be prepared to do either”.*

Through The Skill Mill there is “*the message that they’re not getting from anywhere else*”. The young people do not necessarily see the supervisors as part of the ‘authority’. “*We get a greater level of respect, and we can connect with them better*”. The young people’s earlier experiences have often led them not to appreciate the authorities and justice system staff. In the day-to-day work with the supervisor, they have time to discuss their issues, learn on daily bases and get the sense that the supervisors “*have chosen to help these kids out*”. Hence, the selection of the supervisor is of great importance in the work of the Skill Mill. They understand their role to be supporting and letting the young people see their own potential as well. The YOT staff member was really impressed with the second supervisor’s understanding around the sort of the trauma and how that impacts on behaviour and the difficulty that a lot of these children have. “*He can navigate how to best manage those children to move them forward, which is, a real skill to have*”.

The second supervisor has been excellent according to the YOT’s staff since not only has he got work background in terms of entry in the trade but “*he’s also got that other side in terms of understanding some of the difficulties that the children encounter and how to sort of navigate and work with them*”. So that supervisor has been able to bring real life experience and work with him.

*“He’s very clear in terms of expectations, but he’s also really supportive with children. So what we have seen is they respond really well to him, um, and actually go to him for support and guidance. And that’s worked really well in terms of I think also having a positive male role model within their lives who sort of comes and works and demonstrates that”.*

The young people have thought of him highly as well: “*he’s just too good, helps you with everything, can’t fault him. If you feel like you’re stuck, people around are the best thing for you.*”

“He (the supervisor) has given us as much help as he can, I wouldn’t be here without Skill Mill. I’ve enjoyed everything about it”.

The importance of the positive role model is further supported by the cognitive transformation theory, where the main driver for change is not a turning point that is external to the individual but a subjective **reflection on the self** (Giordano et al, 2002). As young people mature, they may undergo **changes in identity** that prompt them both to desist from crime and to look for work (Giordano et al., 2002). Cognitive transformation theory would expect that desistance was based on access to “the hooks” for change and the person’s determination to search for them (Cid, 2007). Consequently, the identity change would desist a person from crime.

Criminological research discussing the impact of **peer relationships** on behaviour tends to polarise peers into “anti-social” pressures or “pro-social” influences, with each category representing different people or groups. Thus, people talk about the need for disassociation from “negative” influences and re-connection with pro-social former associates or the development of new pro-social relationships (Sapouna et al, 2015). People’s social networks can be a context that triggers the desire to change. The young people see the value in the team.

*“We help each other. It's all about teamwork around here with a Skill Mill”. They're (the team) amazing. They don't do anything to get on my nerves. They don't do anything to make me lose my temper, and we just do everything together.”*

*“On the days I couldn't get up and felt really sad I knew the rest of the team would get me through and keep me busy, we have a laugh together”.*

One of the ideas that the YOT staff member proposed was to have not a fixed cohort of young people for six months but a rolling cohort where there are some established people and bring the next ones on. With the example of the second cohort that has been working quite well. There are two young persons who potentially could be coming on in the next couple of weeks as well to feed into that rolling element. It could be a good way of doing it if you've got the right people on to help support them and bring them along with the previous team members.

The importance of the **family support** has been acknowledged by the supervisors but also the fact that they cannot change any family dynamics if the support of the parents is not there. Many young people in Skill Mill have families where unemployment is entrenched in their families and those young individuals find it very hard to break that path dependency. As the supervisor claimed:

*“It can be quite difficult to make change, but, as I say, we try and a part of my role is to have them keep that relationship with parents or guardians.”*

The approach of the young person’s family is very important. The boy from the second cohort claimed: *“They've (the family) seen a big change in me, and I'll just want things to get done, and just to move forward and just achieve everything that I could achieve”.*

Factors that have been found to be related to desistance include a desire to change one's life, the development of positive relationships, and the acquisition of new skills and education. Research has also found that young people who have a sense of purpose and a **belief in their ability** to achieve their goals are more likely to desist from criminal behaviour. Conversely, young people who lack motivation and a sense of direction are more likely to continue to engage in criminal behaviour. The supervisors have the conversations with young people about

their **motivation** and the main driver tends to money for the young people. At the same time, it is not necessarily reflected in their behaviour since then they would not want to lose a day's wage by not getting up in the morning and going to work. According to the supervisor *"they don't think about their future in the sense of like, well, they would be able to maybe get a better workplace"*. It takes them weeks to start thinking that way and then again they are often curious about money and what kind of salaries would any of the professions bring them. *"So now I get lots of questions and how much does a plumber in a day how much does a bricklayer earn"* explained the supervisor. The difference in the salary of the young people due to their age difference has caused issues and questions for the young people as the 18 year olds earn more than 17 year olds. Those discussions with the supervisor about the pay have allowed them to understand the real-life work conditions and laws, but also created sometimes unnecessary issues within the team. Once thinking about the future, the young people might be very ambitious. A boy from the second cohort explained:

*"I'd want to start business, and then just see where that business takes us. Obviously you got to put in all hard work, carry on with the motivation, and just stay dedicated. I like all of that sort of stuff like construction."*

A young person explained that he feels that he gets treated like an adult, not like when he was at school. He feels respected by the rest of the team and in turn, respects them also. He likes having his own money but also likes being able to help out with the family bills and "do his bit" he gives his mum money towards the outgoings each week.

There are changes that the supervisors and staff can observe about the young people's behaviour and working in a team across the weeks in the program. The supervisor brought an example of a shy boy who could not even eat his lunch nor speak in front of others but after weeks the positive outcome in his behaviour was observed and his **self-confidence** had raised.

*"I was shy before and hated meeting new people, it's helped me with my confidence and I don't worry about things as much"*.

Positive relationships with community and family, in addition to employment are factors that increase desistance motivation. They also help to **build self-esteem**, and a **sense of identity** that allows one to separate from a criminal past. As the first cohort worked with a charity project Family Action creating a community place for vulnerable adults, they had to test their communication skills and tolerance in practice. Their confidence levels increased, and individual skills improved. One of the boys described the work as

*"an amazing opportunity to just turn everything around and try to out my anger issues, how I speak to people and just how I carry on like going, and just keep everything moving forward and I feel like going in the Skill Mill, yeah, has put everything in place and just fully put me in the road."*

*"It's helped with my future, I now feel like I could get another job and make something of myself."*

The change in self-esteem and sense of identity has also been observed by the YOT staff. *“And what we have seen is them grow massively in confidence in their ability in terms of their home life. We’ve seen that they really improve from the feedback we’ve had from parents as well”*.

The young people themselves describe the change: “As long as you stick to work, you see an improvement in yourself”. “Skill Mill is great, it’s for people who thought they weren’t gonna get a chance in life and helps you turn your life around”. He is grateful for the opportunity of working with Skill Mill and this will help him go on to find further work. He likes being able to earn his own wage and have money to buy his own things. He enjoys working with the other boys and feels they work well as a team.

#### 4.3. Local partnership building

According to the theory of desistance from crime, employment is seen to reduce crime by providing routines, supervision, and reduced economic incentives for criminal activity (Sampson and Laub, 1993). These aspects are the ones that the Skill Mill offers and were viewed positively as potentially contributing to good outcomes. However, research on employment and desistance is mixed, suggesting there are other variables impacting the desistance and employment relationship, such as age, work intensity, job type, co-workers normativity (Long et al, 2018). While there is no systematic evidence identifying a relationship between having a job and giving up crime, it is safe to argue that employment itself does not produce desistance in a deterministic sense and may, in and of itself, not play a causal role. Instead, what emerges as significant in enabling or reinforcing efforts to desist are **the meaning and outcomes of the nature and/or quality of the work** or simply **participation in employment** and how these experiences influence an individual’s self-concept and social identity - as well as how they interact with a person’s priorities, goals and relational concerns (Weaver, 2015).

The work with the Skill Mill teaches the young people rules and certain routine but also being managed by other people which is not easy for them to cope with, to be told how and what to do. The supervisor explained: *“My main expectation was that they would be able to get themselves up in the morning. And the expectation was for them to carry out the tasks in a safe way on site”*.

It helps to build the self-esteem if the young people see that the work they do is meaningful. They can find the work easily boring. For example, in the RAF base they were mostly building fences for weeks. This also allowed them to learn that in the reality to get a job, where there's a lot of variation, is quite impossible with their skills.

A source of motivation for the young people is the perspective to have the follow-on job. The **local partnerships** are therefore relevant to make sure that there are further employment opportunities. Building local partnerships has been difficult but both of the supervisors have been able to use their networks to engage with some partners. The local partnership building requires time and trust building. The supervisor expressed the disappointment that they had not been able to make links with local employers.

*“We are quite rich in environmental projects which maybe a lot of the cities are not, so I’ve been a little bit disappointed that we haven’t been able to tap into that we’ve got one of the biggest forests in Britain”.*

One of the ways to promote the skills of the young people was to create a photo book to evidence to the future employers all the things that they have done so that *“when they go for interviews, they can take that book with them as well, and show the journey, rather than what three of them do, which is struggle to talk about themselves”.*

According to the supervisor the lack of the CSCS card (construction certificate) has stopped a lot of projects with the private sector partners from taken off. The process of taking the tests for the necessary qualification has been hindered by the abilities of the young people and as they have learning difficulties, it takes them a long time to achieve it. The supervisor suggested that it would be good to provide the young people with a certificate acknowledging their soft skill development. Building case studies about the young people would help a lot in bringing the partners on board and capturing the achievements but it would double the workload for the supervisors. The photos of the sites before and after the work are there but writing the narratives of the processes would take too much effort as the supervisors work alongside the young people.

*“It wouldn’t be so bad if when we got to work we were just sitting in the van watching the guys paint fences and we could make notes while they are doing it”.*

As evidenced earlier, the Skill Mill’s supervisor’s work is also about being a role model. *“It’s a fine line between having three lads watch me do that and three lads doing it with me”.*

The commissioner of the work has been very pleased with the Skill Mill which was chosen to a large extent because of the reasonable price offer but also the work with desistance. It is very important to assure the client that the Skill Mill will take care of the young people with the supervisor and there will be no additional burden for the client to address any team related issues, The commissioner explained:

*“They reassured us from the start about how they’re gonna, you know, I don’t want to say babysit, but chaperone their team”.*

The feedback of the clients has been very positive, also about the quality of the work. The Skill Mill was chosen by the corporation as there has been a big drive over the last year to engage with small and medium sized companies and give them the opportunity to price. According to the commissioner *“there are no metrics, but there is increasing visibility of the need to engage with local and smaller companies, and especially companies like Skill Mill which are there for other reasons”.* Quite often they are not selected as there is a higher cost because of all the extra work that goes into it. Hence, the big drive is on keeping costs and especially in big companies and *“the social aspect does tend to get lost”.* For better partnership building purposes it would be important for the Skill Mill to showcase what work has been done, the quality of it, and also the feedback from the client. Transforming the lives of young people should be commended. It is not only about the values but also making sure to price correctly in order to get corporate clients. One *“can’t let those standards slip, because that’s when the client starts to notice and*

*pick up on it*". Hence, the contract with the RAF Lakenheath has been really good for the young people in terms of being able to see progression, what work actually looks like on a day-to-day basis. For the YOT the work has been really positive. If the Skill Mill team is self-funding then then they would be more than happy to continue the pilot in its current format. For the current team members finishing in March there's potential for apprenticeships if acquiring CSCS cards.

One of the partnership plans in the area has been to do work around Sandringham palace, especially off the back of the Queen's Award. Other opportunities involve the environment agencies, Forestry Commission, and rural based organisation and agencies.

#### 4.4. The contribution to CRF goals

To nurture innovative thinking and offer flexibility, the CRF expects that the projects align with one, or deliver across several, of the following investment priorities:

- Investment in skills
- Investment for local business
- Investment in communities and place
- Supporting people into employment

In addition to the benefits for the young people, the aim of the pilot was to contribute to the local community and environment, to offer the jobs which are environmental based and to support the local community. In the Norfolk program the young people have directly improved the local communities by working with the Family Action charity organisation creating spaces for vulnerable adults in the communities and worked in the allotments where they have done some clearing and other meaningful work.

The work in the RAF base has directly been linked to maintenance of the environment.

The CRF goals are reflected in the Skill Mill's environmental values. The work done contributes to the UN sustainable development goals as indicated below.

##### Goal 13 – Climate Action

The Skill Mill is an environmental services organisation. In Norfolk's case the young people helped to keep the local green spaces clean. The work helps reduce the risks created by the climate change.

##### Goal 15 - Life on Land

The jobs like clean-ups and litter picking contributed to the protection of natural habitats and green areas.

##### Goal 1 – End poverty

The work is done by the young people who are disadvantaged and ended in the criminal justice system. By allowing the young people break the cycle of poverty and getting a follow-on job, the pilot contributed to that goal.



## 5. Conclusions

The current report presents the results of piloting the Skill Mill model in Norfolk. Based on the interviews with the front-line staff the Skill Mill work experience could give them the needed skills, training, the habit of work routine, salary, self-esteem and a positive role model and potentially a follow-on work opportunity which would contribute to reducing their re-offending behaviours.

Due to the delayed confirmation on funding from the Central Government, there were difficulties in the beginning to find employers who would be able to commission work and there was little time for the seconded supervisor to find work and recruit young people. The second supervisor has turned out to be the excellent choice and proved the importance of the supervisor for the success of the whole team of young people.

There is evidence from the young people themselves, from the supervisors and from the staff that the young people have undergone changes, they have gained self-confidence and self-esteem and learned new skills which potentially help them to pass the CSCS card tests to secure further employment.

The essence and success of the Skill Mill model lies also in its innovative nature. According to the typology of scaling social innovations and enterprises, there are many more ways than just one process. The Skill Mill has gained a high profile and received excellent public recognition. The excellent work done in the RAF Lakenheath site could be turned into a showcase with its photos evidencing the work and telling the stories of the transformations of the young people in order to translate the current success into external contracts with private partner to generate income and ensure sustainability.

## 6. Recommendations

The delay from the CRF was significant which hampered the delivery of the pilot in an efficient and timely manner. It would be important to avoid and at least communicate to the applicants such significant changes.

Trust and commitment are important for a social enterprise to succeed. Co-creating solutions is recommended. However, the limited conversations between the Skill Mill and senior management level of Norfolk Youth Justice Service impacted upon the smooth start of the program.

It would be necessary to coordinate the communication between the Skill Mill, the supervisor and the YOTs very clearly around the expectations of the role of the supervisor.

Theoretically there is no maximum to employer sales, unlike other outcomes revenues which are capped. It would be important to very clearly showcase the corporate partners the work successfully undertaken and evidence the success with the photos of the work and case studies of the young people. Skill Mill leaders have established good contacts with some of the large business organisations such as Kier, Balfour Beatty, United Utilities, CEG, Bowmer & Kirkland, the success of which can be beneficial in other sites where they have operations.

In order to keep better track of the successes of the young people and develop the case studies, it would be good to establish a feasible system for capturing changes. Currently there are some soft outcomes in which case the distance travelled for those young people is not captured well, e.g. changes in self-confidence, anxiety, self-identity, etc. The feedback from the young people and the parents is captured but there is room for improvement, e.g. collecting some data on how they are progressing. At the same time the system cannot become an additional complicated burden for the supervisors who would need to document those changes formally.

## References

- Cid J and Martí J (2017) Imprisonment, social support, and desistance: A theoretical approach to pathways of desistance and persistence for imprisoned men. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 61 (13): 1433–1454.
- European Commission & the OECD (2016) *Policy Brief on Scaling the Impact of Social Enterprises: Policies for social entrepreneurship*. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Policy-brief-Scaling-up-social-enterprises-EN.pdf>
- Giordano P, Cernkovich S and Rudolph J (2002) Gender, crime and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107 (4): 990–1064.
- HM Inspectorate of Probation (2022) *An inspection of youth offending services in Surrey*, <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/surrey-yos/>
- HM Treasury. Magenta Book (2020) Central Government guidance on evaluation.
- Long, M.A., Oswald, R., Stretesky, P.B. & Soppitt, S. (2018) Do Flood Mitigation and Natural Habitat Protection Employment Reduce Youth Offending? *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 25, 135–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-017-9365-y>
- Sampson RJ, Laub JH (1993) *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sapouna M, Bisset C, Conlong AM and Matthews B (2015) What works to reduce reoffending: A summary of the evidence. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-reoffending-summary-evidence/>
- UK Community Renewal Fund: An Overview. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus-2021-22#uk-community-renewal-fund-an-overview>
- Youth Justice Statistics 2020/21. Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice (2022) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1054236/Youth\\_Justice\\_Statistics\\_2020-21.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1054236/Youth_Justice_Statistics_2020-21.pdf)
- Weaver B (2015) *Offending and desistance: The importance of social relations*. London: Routledge.
- White, R. and Graham, H. 2015. Greening Justice: Examining the Interfaces of Criminal, Social and Ecological Justice. *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol 55 (5) <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu117>