

# Closing the employment gaps

## Insights from the Employability Day round table

28 June 2019

### Summary and key points

- The Forward Trust and Brent Council hosted a roundtable to explore employer approaches to supporting ex-offenders, those in recovery from addiction, the unemployed and those considered 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' (NEET) into jobs and apprenticeships
- The event brought together a range of employers from the private, public, commercial and not-for-profit sectors
- Participants heard presentations from The Forward Trust's Director of Employment Services, Asi Panditharatna; Jonny Pilkington, Public Sector Engagement Manager at Redemption Roasters; and Annie Gale, Cook's RAW Talent Manager
- Participants also heard from Cllr Amer Agha, Brent Council's Cabinet Member for Schools, Employment & Skills and Cllr Tom Miller, Brent Council's Cabinet Member for Community Safety
- Participants felt that **challenges** to recruiting ex-offenders, people in recovery and NEETs include negative employer mindsets; insufficient focus on the personal qualities needed for job success; low pay of roles that were available to them; and insufficient focus on careers and job satisfaction
- They felt that **successful and helpful approaches** include broadening recruitment approaches and practices; implementing Ban the Box and encouraging ex-offenders to demonstrate how they have moved beyond their offence; removing labels such as 'ex-offender' and 'care leaver'; providing in-work support; and developing entrepreneurship skills
- **Benefits to employers** of recruiting people from these groups include improved team spirit and organisational culture; filling skills gaps; widening the talent pool; and enabling innovation

### Key takeaway

More employer education is needed to challenge stigma that exists about recruiting people from disadvantaged backgrounds and promote a focus on talent and opportunity rather than risk.

### Get in touch

To find out more about the work and issues discussed in this paper, including Bright Futures and the Forward Enterprise Fund, contact: [employment@forwardtrust.org.uk](mailto:employment@forwardtrust.org.uk)

## Introduction

On the 28 June 2019, in partnership with Brent Council, The Forward Trust celebrated Employability Day with a roundtable event, 'Closing the Employment Gaps'. The event brought together employers and partners to highlight the actions that employers are taking to support ex-offenders and other unemployed and NEET groups into jobs and apprenticeships.

Our event also launched Bright Futures, a new specialist employment programme provided by The Forward Trust in Brent. The programme enables ex-offenders to secure employment in good quality jobs that are aligned to their skills.

## Who took part?

Participants included representatives from:

- [Cook](#)
- [Redemption Roasters](#)
- [Amey](#)
- [New Futures Network](#)
- [Network Housing](#)
- [Umbrella Training](#)
- [CareTrade Charitable Trust](#)



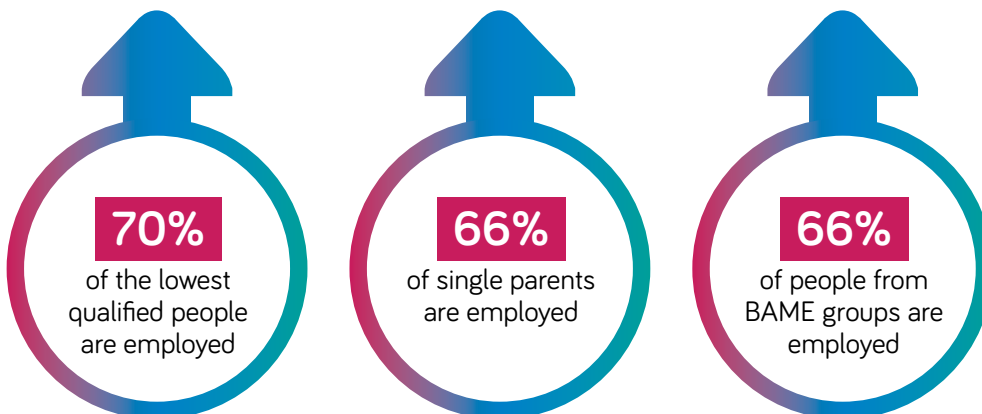
## Presentation highlights



Asi Panditharatna  
Director of Employment Services  
The Forward Trust

Asi argued that closing employment gaps helps build an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. He highlighted some encouraging signs of progress:

- There are more people in employment overall, with national employment rates currently around 76%
- More people from groups furthest away from the labour market are getting into work:



- More employers are employing ex-offenders:



- Devolution is helping the London Mayor to focus funding such as the Adult Education Budget on social mobility groups and helping people progress in work as well

However, significant challenges remain for ex-offenders and people from lower socio-economic groups. [Research by the think-tank Onward](#) found:

- Just **17%** of prisoners achieve payroll employment 12 months after leaving prison
- Employment rates for ex-offenders with no qualifications are at **43%** compared to 72% for those with Level 2 qualifications
- Re-offending rates are lower for those in work - **39%** compared to nearly 60% for those not in work, according to [research by the Ministry of Justice](#)

People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be in low pay and then tend to get 'stuck':

- The '[Social Mobility in Great Britain](#)' report confirms that people with the least skills are least likely to get training and higher or degree-level apprenticeships
- Significant numbers of people are employed in insecure jobs in with zero-hour agency contracts or the gig economy. Estimates range from 1.3 million to 2.8 million people who are employed in the gig economy. These roles do not provide job satisfaction, security or contractual rights and can make it hard to plan for the longer term

At Forward, we believe the solution is about:

- **Focusing on better jobs and careers, not just getting a job.** Investing in high quality and outstanding career journey advice and guidance as well as helping people to access jobs and apprenticeship roles that will help them to continue to develop their qualifications, improve their pay and progress in life
- **Developing the right mindset in the people we support.** Employers will impart the technical skills to do a job. However, they need people with the right attitudes and qualities to add value to their workforce. Our '15 ways to lose your job' workshop, led by our clients, highlights what behaviours it takes to succeed (or not!) in a job or apprenticeship
- **Creating pathways prison to communities.** Joining up prison education and training to higher-level qualifications in the community and work-based training



Jonny Pilkington  
Public Sector Engagement Manager  
Redemption Roasters

[VIEW JONNY'S PRESENTATION](#)

Redemption Roasters is the UK's first prison-based coffee roaster. They were approached by the Ministry of Justice about starting a roasting enterprise and barista training centre inside the walls of a prison. They founded their first roaster in HMP Aylesbury and are currently working in five prisons, with four more prison-based projects in the pipeline.

Focusing on building on education, training and employment to prevent re-offending, Redemption Roasters:

- Have **trained over 150** offenders in competition-level barista skills
- **Employed nine** ex-offenders in their cafes who, upon release, wanted to begin a career in hospitality
- Learners have gone on to **work in the wider industry** and found promotion opportunities within Redemption Roasters

“ We are not the solution...but hopefully we are an example and an inspiration”  
Jonny Pilkington



Annie Gale  
RAW Talent Manager  
Cook

[VIEW ANNIE'S PRESENTATION](#)

Cook provides remarkable food for your freezer that looks and tastes homemade. A family-owned and run business, Cooks now employs 1,000 people and sells food through nearly 100 shops across UK with growing concessions and e-commerce businesses.

RAW Talent stands for 'READY AND WORKING'. The programme supports people to overcome barriers to employment by providing work and training opportunities in their business. This includes serving prisoners; homeless people; and those with mental health difficulties.

Challenges	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Overcoming prejudices</li><li>Doesn't necessarily boost retention</li><li>Can be as deeply frustrating as it is rewarding</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It gives us a sense of pride and purpose</li><li>Having a job often improves people's health</li><li>Having a job on release from prison roughly halves the chance of re-offending</li><li>Working with people from all walks of life makes us better people who are better at our jobs</li></ul>

**RAW Talent success factors include:**

- Working with partners to recruit and serve participants' wider needs, such as housing, mental health and addiction, as well as to recruit them
- Offering participants a fully paid job from the start, on the same terms as other employees - including if they are currently serving a prison sentence
- Providing extra support if they need it, including a 'buddy'
- Training staff to support each other - they have trained 30 people to date as 'mental health first aiders' - including nearly all our Kitchen Managers

**So far, RAW Talent outcomes include:**

- 72 participants since 2014
- 17 participants currently employed in the business
- The programme led to one participant's first-ever job

## Highlights from the roundtable discussion

### Best practice and what works

#### Recruitment practices

It was felt that recruiting managers should raise their awareness about different approaches including values-based recruitment, mock or practice assessment centres, guaranteed job interviews and offering work experience.

#### Ban the Box

Participants felt that the principle of [Ban the Box](#) - where criminal record tick boxes are removed from application forms - is as important. They felt that employers should have open discussions with clients who are ex-offenders and base their decision-making on the qualities needed for the job. It is also important for ex-offenders to demonstrate work done in prisons, social action and other jobs to show how they have moved on since committing their offence.

#### Treating people as individuals

One employer felt that the terms 'ex-offender' and 'care leaver' are unnecessary labels and that the focus should be on talents and mindsets.

#### Mentoring and in-work support

Participants felt that mentoring and in-work support, such as that offered by Forward, can help clients to stay in and prosper in their jobs.

#### Developing entrepreneurship

Helping clients to become self-employed or start up new enterprises via schemes such as the Forward Enterprise Fund was felt to be a solution that can support a focus on careers and long-term job satisfaction.

### Challenges in recruiting ex-offenders and people in recovery from addiction

- Employer mindsets such as fear that these groups represent a risk, disrupt the running of their organisations and lead to more use of human resources or management time
- Recruitment practices in some employers are still competency and experience-based and not focused on the personal qualities needed to succeed in a job
- Attitudes to work: participants felt that positive role models, in the form of peer mentors or mentors, would help promote positive attitudes toward work among some client groups
- Salary expectations are a challenge for some clients, particularly for entry-level jobs. To address this, participants felt that employers should work to the London Living Wage/London Mayor Good Work Standard where possible
- Encouraging employment service providers to focus on careers: participants felt that apprenticeship standards were a great opportunity to move towards career-focused delivery. Participants representing apprenticeship levy employers were keen to recruit clients from these groups

## Benefits to employers

Participants felt that there were a range of benefits to organisations from employing groups such as ex-offenders, including:

- Better corporate team spirit
- Creating a more open culture
- A pleasant surprise at the accepting attitudes of staff already in post towards people with convictions
- Filling skills gaps and addressing needs
- Having a wider talent pool of people with different life experiences
- More diverse opinions and views enabling organisation fresh thinking and innovation

## Get in touch

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# Redemption Roasters

forward

In partnership with



Delivering  
Bright Futures



- Founded in 2016 by Max & Ted
- Approached by the MOJ about starting a roasting enterprise and barista training centre inside the walls of a prison
- Aylesbury identified as the site for our Roastery
- A wholesale business with a key objective
- **Reducing the rates of reoffending**
- Profit & Purpose go hand in hand
- Our wholesale business quickly developed into a retail cafe business and was followed by a prison education business.
- Currently working in 5 prisons with 6, 7, 8 and 9 on the way.....and maybe 10 and 11!!



## Why bother???

We already know that prisoners are 50% more likely to reoffend if they leave prison without skills or a job. And we definitely know that in specialty coffee we need exceptional skills





**There are 7 pathways to prevent re-offending, these are:**

- Accommodation.
- Education, training and employment.
- Health.
- Drugs and alcohol.
- Finance, benefit and debt.
- Children and families.
- Attitudes, thinking and behaviour.



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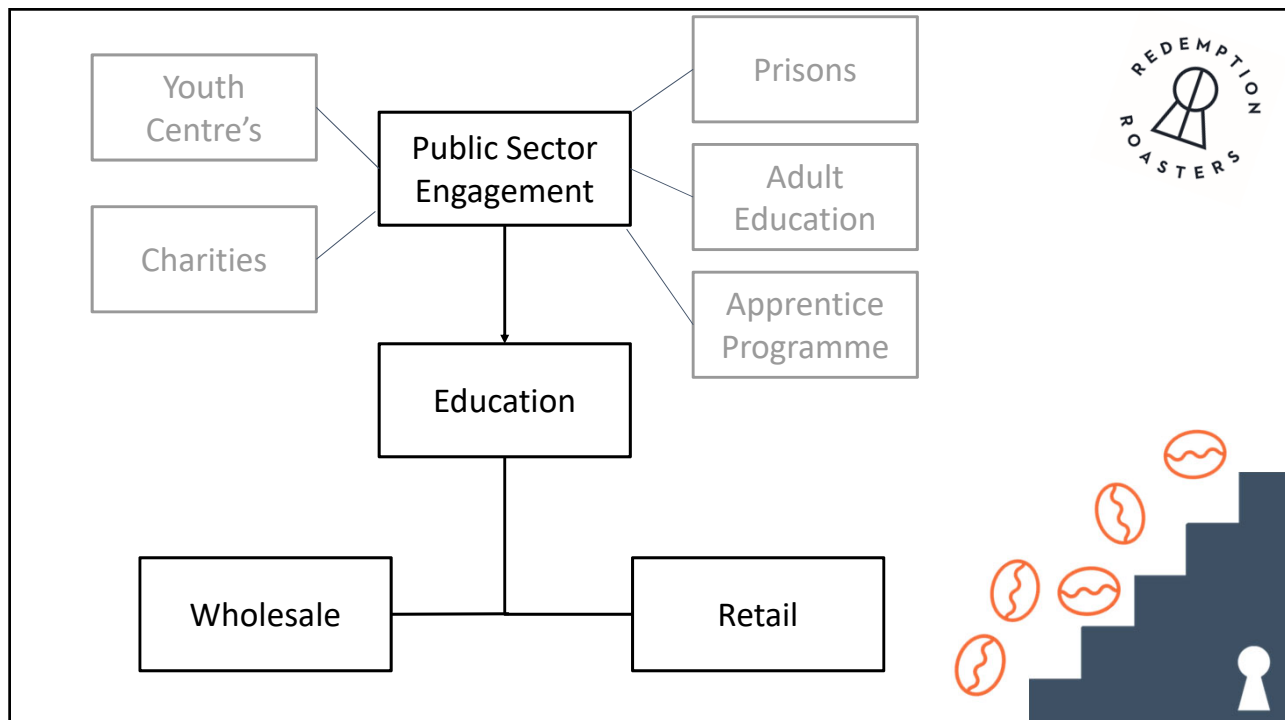
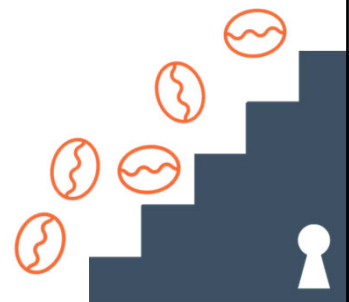


"People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe" *Simon Sinek - Organisational consultant, Author and motivational speaker*

"The Human Being disappears in the system" *Lady Edwina Grosvner - Founder of 'The Clink' restaurant chain*

"The press never write any positive stories about prisons but there is a lot of good that happens" *Prison Guard, HM Prison Service*

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse." *Henry Ford - Developer of the first affordable car*



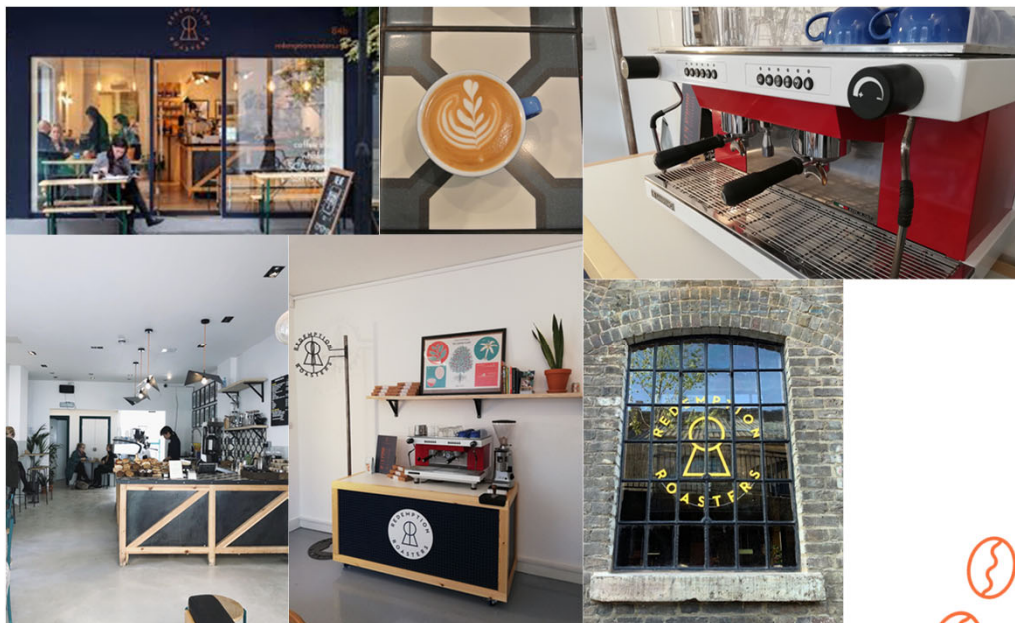
We have trained over 150 offenders in Competition level barista skills



We have employed 9 ex-offenders in our own cafes who, upon release wanted to begin a career in Hospitality

Our Learners have gone on to work in the wider industry and found promotion within Redemption Roasters

**We are not the solution.....but hopefully we are an example and an inspiration**



Thanks for listening.....Any Questions





## Intro

I'm Annie. Oversee our RAW Talent prog at COOK.

RAW Talent – Stands for 'READY AND WORKING' – supporting people with barriers to employment to get stuck in and do a brilliant job at COOK. This currently includes those who've been out of work because of being in prison; being homeless; or having mental health difficulties.



- Remarkable food for your freezer – looks & tastes like made at home
- Started just over **21 years ago**, by Ed & Dale from a tiny kitchen in North Kent
- **Ed** still running the business, with **sister Rosie**, Dale retired
- Family business – family owned and run
- Grown steadily over the last 21 years, including lots of mistakes and struggles – nearly folded – but still doing business in the same way, and loving it
- Now £65k, 1000 people, selling food through nearly 100 shops across UK / growing concessions & ecommerce business
- Certified as B corp – v proud!



... that looks and tastes like you made it at home



—COOK—

### 3 areas

**Kitchens & logistics** – make & freeze lovely food (see it in a minute); transport it to our shops; Mainly here (400 pax - Sittingbourne)

**Shops** – 90 + around the country; concessions & ecommerce growing fast; (450 pax – all over UK)

**Office** – All support teams – finance, brand, supplier management, ops, people, IT, customer service.... (100 pax - Sittingbourne)

**Puds** - Somerset

### Growth

Building new kitchen, opening 15 Feb 2020, Sittingbourne



All about culture...

# ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

WHAT MAKES US  
» COOK «



—COOK—

These are our values



These are our values



So. That's COOK.

Now **RAW Talent**... RAW Talent is something we're really proud of – it's a massive team effort!

- This has been in our DNA since we were born 20 years ago
- going on quietly and brilliantly for at least 7 years.
- About 4.5 years ago we started taking note of who came from where; it became 'a thing'.
- Started in our people team
- My role created nearly 2 yrs ago
- Now it is a defining part of COOK, and one of the many things that makes COOK different and really special.
- Heard from our Finance Manager – interviewed lots of people 2 weeks ago for a post – RAW Talent – top thing that attracted people to work here! Above values!!
- Had 73 people through RAW Talent

So – taking it seriously – ramping it up following review, celebrating 5 years & re-launch in Sept 2019 – pilot new version in Jan 2020.

Building on firm foundations – tighter, better, clearer re mission, who we're supporting &

who we're not; desired outputs; the prog itself; and how we measure success / hold ourselves accountable

We're serious about RAW Talent – and we're looking for people who are serious about working hard and moving forward.

## Why are we doing it?



### Reasons for not doing it

- Challenging / prejudices
- Doesn't nec boost retention – working really hard on that
- Littered with learning & challenges
- Can be as deeply frustrating as it is rewarding

### Reasons for doing it

Loads of reasons – you know these:

- pays the bills / roof over head – but more than that, it gives us a sense of pride and purpose
- Having a job often improves people's health
- Having a job on release from prison roughly halves the chance of reoffending
- We're a B Corp – we have a legal commitment to do this stuff!
- Finally, selfishly – working with people from all walks of life makes us better people, better at our jobs, and more proud of this than anything else!
- A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor!
- More than all that:
  - Do it cos it's the right thing to do

What are we doing?

Start from today. Ignore  
the past.  
Look forward.



- This is what we try to do. Very simple... not easy.
- We start from today. Ignore the past. (Might learn from it, but we don't judge people's potential based on it). Look forward.
- By seeing people as people, looking at the person, not the shadow, and by determinedly focussing on what they're capable of achieving (as opposed to on things that have gone wrong), little by little... with patience... everything can change.
- You know better than anyone – this stuff sounds simple but it's not easy!!

How?



We work  
with  
partners



### What does it look like?

#### **We work with Partners**

- As you know, there are loads of pieces that need to fit together to get life back on track
- Having a job is one piece in the jigsaw – but it is a huge one
- We make amazing food... but we aren't experts in housing / mh / addictions – the other 'pieces' etc.
- Need to work with partner orgs (charities, prisons etc) to
  - find people who need a job; and
  - support them once they're at COOK



How?



We offer  
support

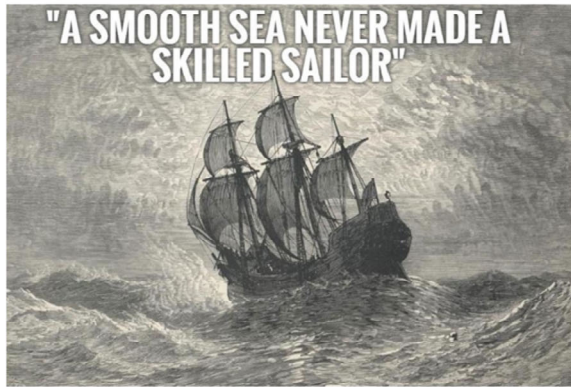


### We offer support

- We offer people on RAW Talent prog a job, fully paid from the word go, on the same terms as anyone else, including if they are currently serving a prison sentence.
- We offer people extra support if they need it, including a '**buddy**' – someone to get alongside them and answer their qus
- Recently, for those who need a bit of extra help, we've started offering
  - **Coaching** during engagement period
  - **Extra support for specific needs** – eg helping to manage anxiety in work, via partner org (The Shaw Trust)
- Over past 6 months we've trained up 30 people, including nearly all our Kitchen Managers, as **MH First Aiders**



How?



We take on  
the  
challenge!



### **We take on the Challenge!**

- Over the years, it has been a case of persistence and learning – we are up for this, because it is good for all of us
- Sailing on the choppy seas teaches us so much more as people, and grows our business so much more powerfully, than the easier routes

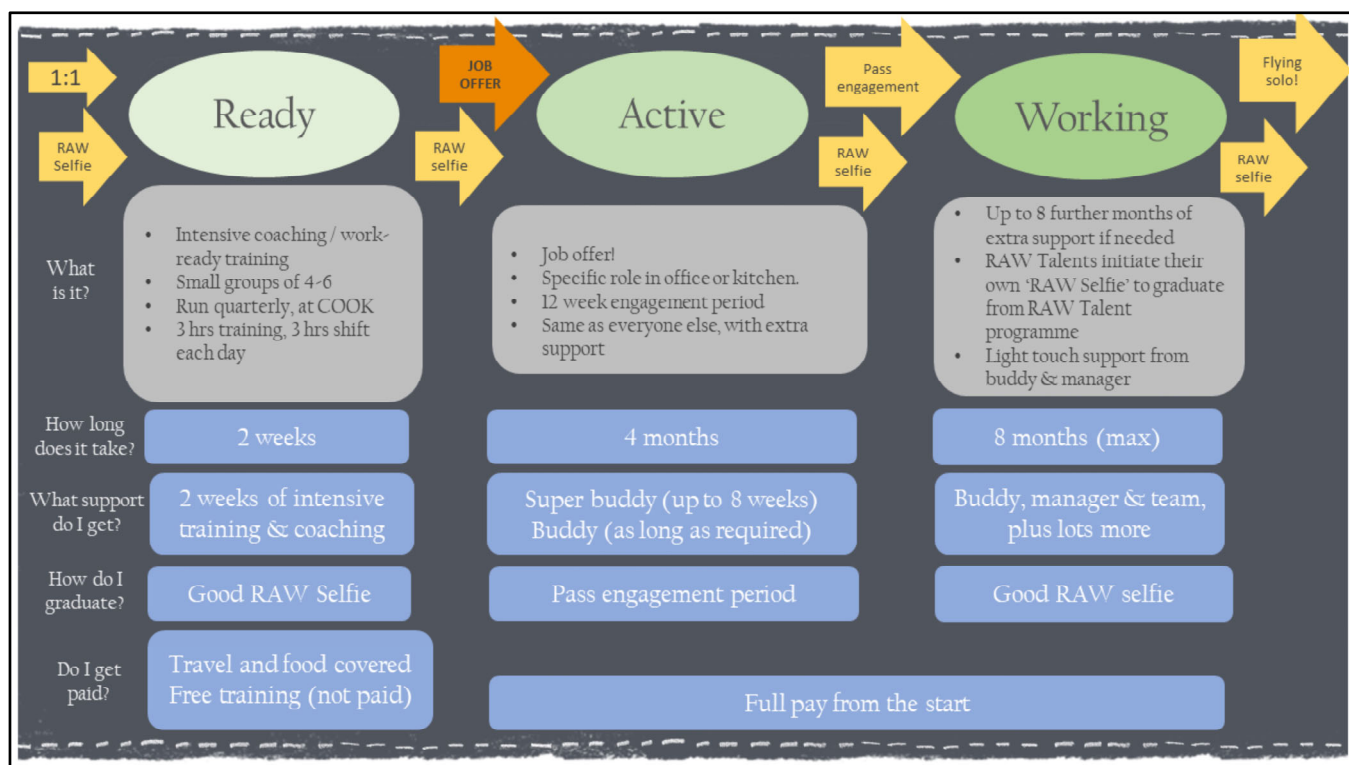
# RAW Talent has 3 stages...



- There are 3 stages to the RAW Talent programme.
- We recommend starting at the beginning.
- Like going to the gym – it takes a bit of time to build up ‘work muscles’, and it is more effective to do this at a sensible pace, and with some help
- It is possible to skip the first stage, but only if you / your partner organisation can show that you’re really ready for this. If in doubt, we recommend you accept the support. Nothing lost.

Ready.  
Active.  
Working.





## Where are we now?

72 RAW  
Talents  
since  
2014

17  
current  
RAW  
Talents



9 in the  
kitchen/  
logistic

3 at HQ

3 in  
shops /  
driving

2 in

### Some numbers....

- Employed John (Red) from the video 2 days per week on RAW Talent prog (3 days in prep in kitchen)
- Doing a review of RAW Talent prog (theory of change workshop for those in the know!):



- Those are just numbers... the really exciting thing for me is the people who are using a job at COOK to change their lives around:
  - One RAW Talent, excellent guy, 6 months with COOK
  - First job – young when convicted, coming to the end of a long prison sentence
  - He has a 15 year old son
  - Told me recently that he had given his son money to go to the cinema the other day. He told me it felt good. It turns out that was the first time he had ever given money to his son that he had earned. 15 years. Powerful stuff.
- Another RAW Talent, young man, 3 young kids, rocky mental health – not an obvious candidate!
- Arrived in the kitchen, looked like he wouldn't last 5 minutes – bit loud, bit annoying, couldn't handle feedback....
- 6 months later, a different man. Calmer, responsive, taking responsibility for his future. Just passed engagement period because of patience and persistence of team & managers. Amazing.
- Another guy instantly slotted into the team, great guy, joined us in Rainham for the Christmas rush last year and decided not to take on the permanent role offered, in favour of an apprenticeship elsewhere.
- Had a really tricky boss and left the other place.