



Oswin Project

Newsletter

2025

GEARING UP FOR CHANGE

On Saturday the 17th of August we had the grand opening of our bike shop, aptly named "Changing the Cycle" it is in the grounds of HMP Northumberland. This new initiative is set to become a hub of opportunity, skill-building, and community service. The High Sheriff of Northumberland Lucia Bridgeman cut the ribbon at the event.

At the shop we offer bike servicing and repairs, quality second-hand bikes for sale and employment and volunteer opportunities for serving prisoners and prison leavers. "Changing the Cycle" isn't just about fixing bikes — it's about fixing lives. Our shop is staffed by a serving prisoner on day release, and an individual with a criminal record.

Our staff receive comprehensive training to the Cytech Technical 2 standard, ensuring top-notch service for our customers.

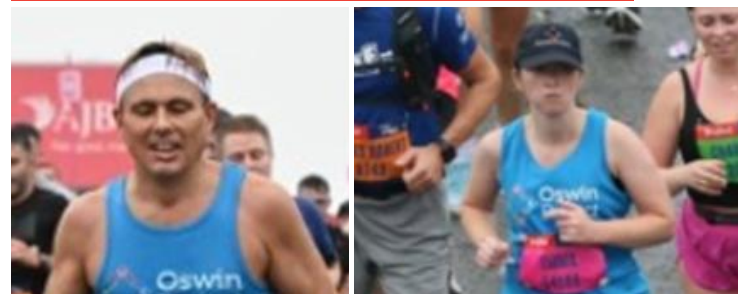
We're starting with servicing and selling second-hand bikes, but we have big plans! We aim to expand into a larger workshop inside the prison, employing and training more individuals to get more recycled and refurbished bikes on the road.

The Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland Dr. Caroline Pryer, Chairman of SSAFA Northumberland branch, attended the event, which featured readings by both a prisoner and the prison governor.

The visit showcased various rehabilitation initiatives including the new Alnwick House accommodation block, tailoring and engineering workshops, market gardens managed by the Oswin Project's "Growing Out" initiative plus our Café 16 and Bakery, an Oswin Project enterprise within the prison.

This event underscored our ongoing commitment to support veterans and provide this cohort with rehabilitation opportunities.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GREAT NORTH RUN TEAM



Six dedicated supporters of The Oswin Project crossed the finish line at this year's Great North Run, raising vital funds and awareness for our work in prisoner rehabilitation. Alex, Emma, John, Matilda, Paul, and Wayne all completed the iconic half-marathon course from Newcastle to South Shields, joining thousands of runners in one of Britain's most beloved sporting events. Many congratulations and thanks to them all.

CAFÉ 16 D-DAY EVENT



On June 6th, the 80th anniversary of D-Day, HMP Northumberland hosted a special commemoration service, highlighting partnerships between the prison, SSAFA Northumberland, and the Oswin Project.

To keep up to date with Oswin's work, follow us on:
[@OswinProjects](#) [facebook.com/theoswinproject](https://www.facebook.com/theoswinproject)
www.oswinproject.org.uk
www.oswinproject.org.uk/newsletter

NEW VAN FOR CAFÉ 16



We're thrilled to announce an exciting addition to the Oswin Project family – a new van dedicated to food and pie deliveries! Thanks to the incredible generosity of an anonymous donor, we can now expand our reach and serve our community more efficiently than before.

The new van means we can now deliver to our ever growing list of customers. Our new van's increased capacity and efficiency will allow us to significantly boost the number of deliveries we make each week.

The impact of this donation extends far beyond the immediate benefits of improved deliveries. It represents a vote of confidence in the work we do every day. The van will not only help us meet the growing demand for our services but also raise awareness about the Oswin Project as it travels through Northumberland, becoming a recognisable symbol of support and second chances.

FARM SHOP FLOURISHES



Our farm shop has recently expanded its range and is now stocking an exciting array of local and prison-made products. New additions include delectable jams from Fat Lass Preserves and savoury relishes from a socially responsible company. For those looking to bring a touch of nature indoors, we've introduced a variety of house plants, all nurtured and grown in our very own prison gardens. We've also introduced local honey from a Fine Cell

Work volunteer and artisan cheeses from the Northumberland Cheese Company.

We are particularly pleased to sell a new line of products crafted by women at HMP Low Newton. This initiative plays a crucial role in supporting skills development and rehabilitation for women in the criminal justice system.

UCL CRIMINAL JUSTICE EDUCATION CONFERENCE



The Oswin Project recently played a key role in the National Summer Conference on Education in Criminal Justice at UCL. This event brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss crucial developments in prison education, focusing on digital learning, neurodiversity, and embedding essential skills in prison education.

Our CEO, Fiona Sample, participated in a thought-provoking panel discussion, while Michael Lockwood (Head of the Neurodiversity unit in HMP Northumberland) delivered a presentation showcasing our innovative approaches. These contributions emphasised the transformative power of education in rehabilitation and reintegration, aligning closely with our mission.

The conference successfully bridged the gap between research and practice, amplified the voices of those with lived experience, and showcased innovative work in the field. Presentations from experts like Jon Collins and Dr Victoria Knight provided valuable insights on the future of education in criminal justice settings.

The connections made and knowledge shared will undoubtedly enhance our future initiatives at the Oswin Project. We're grateful to all participants and co-organizers for making this event a resounding success, collectively shaping a more inclusive approach to education in criminal justice.

COMMUNITY ORCHARD TAKES ROOT IN ASHINGTON



Ashington's landscape is set to flourish with a new community orchard project now underway. The Inside & Out team has been brought on board to breathe life into this green initiative. The team is busy preparing the site, clearing the area and laying down gravel pathways to ensure easy access for all community members, creating raised beds, which will soon host a variety of plants and trees.

This orchard isn't just about greenery — it's an investment in community well-being. Once complete, it will offer a natural retreat for residents, opportunities for horticultural learning, and a space for community gatherings. It will also provide a source of fresh, locally grown produce. As work progresses, excitement grows. The next phase will see the planting of fruit trees and other vegetables and shrubs. Community involvement will be key to the orchard's success, so stay tuned for updates on how you can contribute to this blossoming project.

BUILDING SUPPORT SKILLS STAFF COMPLETE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Fraser, the assistant manager in Cafe 16 and Emma our office manager have successfully completed Mental Health First Aid training. The comprehensive course has equipped them with valuable skills to recognise and respond to mental health challenges in the workplace.

As Assistant Manager at Cafe 16 and Office Manager respectively, both team members are now better positioned to support Oswinners and colleagues, adding another important layer to our holistic approach to training and employment.

INTRODUCING BAKING OUT A SLICE OF PIE HEAVEN



Get ready to loosen your belts, folks, because the Oswin Project is baking up a storm! We're thrilled to announce that we've been busy in our bakery, creating up a delectable new range of pies that are a crust above the rest!

At the Oswin Project, we believe in second chances, both for people and for pastries. That's why we've embarked on this tasty adventure to create pies that not only satisfy hunger but also warm the soul. Our team has been working hard, rolling out dough and stirring up fillings, all in the name of pie-fection.

But these pies are more than just a treat for the taste buds. Each one is crafted with care by serving prisoners, providing valuable skills and a sense of accomplishment. Every pie sold helps fund our initiatives and supports those on their journey to rehabilitation.

As we continue to expand our range and perfect our recipes, we can confidently say that for the Oswin Project, the pie is the limit! We're reaching for the pie, and with your support, there's no telling how far we will go.

LOOKING BACK LOOKING FORWARD: OSWIN AT 10



On 11th September 2024 the Oswin Project celebrated its 10th birthday with a party for our trustees, friends, colleagues and supporters. All are owed thanks for sharing our vision and sustaining our work over the past decade.

We all want to see fewer victims of crime, to build safer communities and keep families together and to reduce the financial burden of reoffending. The power to address recidivism through rehabilitation has long been recognised – in 1779 the British Government passed the Penitentiary Act which made rehabilitation of criminals the function of all prisons. By 1799 a second Penitentiary Act was passed making it law that there should only be one person per cell, silence and obligatory activity in prisons.

History is important as it shows very clearly that we have made little progress – what we learn from history is that we have learnt little. If our Victorian ancestors joined us today – they would recognise 2/3rds of the prison estate – what they would not recognise would be the shared cells and the lack of purposeful activity.

On my first trip to prison, I asked many individuals what would stop them returning, the one common denominator was ‘a job’, housing, and financial support were also frequently mentioned. I saw some training and work being offered amongst the ocean of despair I encountered that day, I knew of initiatives to support prisoners on release but what was missing was a bridge of opportunity built between the prison, spanning the chasm to after release and someone to take prisoners across the bridge and ensure they did not stumble and fall into old habits leading to a return trip. The idea of the Oswin Project was born to provide that bridge. Likeminded friends gathered around my kitchen table; a few pounds were put in a building society account and a lot of conversations took place.

Many individuals helped turn the idea into an effective charity, giving their time and expertise to build firm foundations, raise funds and awareness. Our patron, the first chairmen and Trustees sowed and nurtured the seeds of growth, and I am immensely grateful to them all.

Today the Oswin Project has a unique partnership with HMP Northumberland, the site of our first Café 16, bakery, horticultural enterprises, farm shop and bike shop. None of these ventures would have been possible without the prison’s cooperation. The other special partnership we have is with Newcastle Cathedral, where our second Café 16 is situated. Both organisations share our hopes and aims.

Today the need for our work is even greater than it was in 2014. When our pilot project renovating buildings in Pegswood took place, closely followed by the setting up of a painting and decorating squad, none of us could have imagined how much we would achieve in 10 years or the ever-growing demand for our work driven by the ballooning prison population. I am often asked if I worry about working in prisons. The only concern I ever have is about being able to pay my staff as we grow and the funding landscape becomes ever more challenging.

The Oswin Projects objectives are not unique, though the variety of options, opportunities and support we offer are. Most importantly what we do works. In North East England offending rates are a shocking 67%. When prisoners and prison leavers work with us reoffending drops to below 4%. We also practise what we preach, six of our core team are prison leavers.

I am lucky to work with a remarkable and tenacious group of people, united by their aim to give second chances. We have learnt to laugh (rather than cry) at the many frustrations we encounter in the Criminal Justice system. No day is ever dull or similar but there are always challenges.

Onward Oswin!



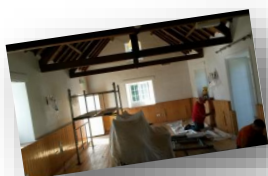
10 YEARS OF SECOND CHANCES



The Pilot Project 2013
In June 2013, four Oswinners renovated a shop in Pegswood.



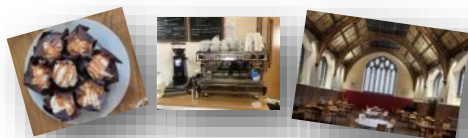
R-Affordables 2017
An affordable housing initiative, in partnership with Rodderick James.



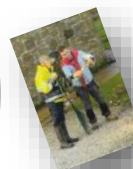
Garden & Maintenance Team
In June 2016, the Oswin Project redecorated Netherwitton Village Hall, conducting a comprehensive facelift including painting and repairs.



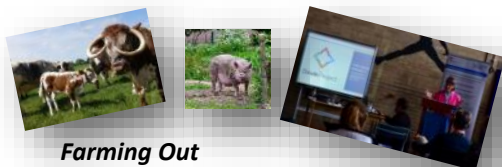
Café 16 in HMP Northumberland
In March 2020, the Oswin Project opened its first Café 16 within HMP Northumberland, a groundbreaking rehabilitation initiative.



Café 16 in Newcastle Cathedral
Café 16 in Newcastle Cathedral, a collaboration between the Cathedral and The Oswin Project, opened on August 12, 2021.



Inside & Out
The Inside and Out team, operational for over five years, has evolved from basic gardening to skilled heritage



Farming Out
The Oswin Project and New Futures Network launched 'Farming Out' at HMP North Sea Camp and HMP Kirkham.



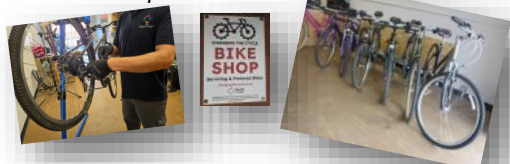
Changing perceptions Conference
The Oswin Project's Changing Perceptions Conference in Newcastle brought together key figures to discuss prisoner rehabilitation.



Changing Perceptions Art Show
The Oswin Project's "Changing Perceptions" art exhibition showcased diverse artworks created by prisoners and ex-prisoners.



Farm Shop
The Oswin Project Farm Shop sells goods made in HMP Northumberland, including baked items, produce, and garden furniture



Bike Shop
The Oswin Project Bike Shop refurbishes and sells pre-owned bicycles, providing valuable skills training to ex-offenders.



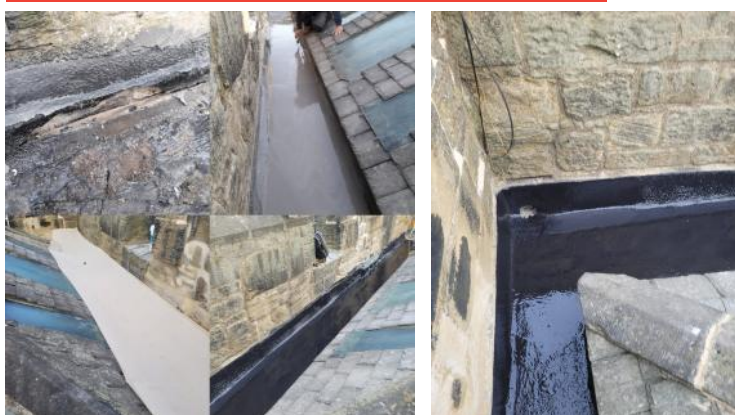
OSWIN PROJECT NAMED MAYOR'S CHARITY OF THE YEAR



The Oswin Project is honoured to serve as the Mayor of Morpeth's Charity of the Year, a distinction that has helped raise both awareness and vital funds for our work supporting ex-offenders in their journey to employment. Throughout the year, the Mayor has championed our cause through a series of community events. A glamorous ball at Morpeth Rugby Club brought together supporters from across the region, while the Cèilidh held at historic Bothal Castle provided an evening of Scottish dancing and merriment.

The local community has embraced our cause with enthusiasm, participating in events including an Italian-themed dinner at a local restaurant, a classical guitar concert, and a well-attended pub quiz. These events have not only generated essential funding but also helped raise awareness about the Oswin Project's mission to break the cycle of reoffending by providing training and employment opportunities. We are deeply grateful to the Mayor and the people of Morpeth for their continued support and generosity.

MORE STONEMWORKING FOR THE INSIDE & OUT TEAM



Extending our heritage stone working skills has stretched the Inside & Out team to new heights. Work on one of Northumberland's finest working castles, a Grade 1 Listed Monument, is underway ensuring that restoration and preservation of our regional heritage is at the very heart of

what we do. No surprise then that the impact on the men carrying out this exacting work, with the same traditional materials and techniques pioneered by the Ancient Greeks, is as profound as it is invigorating. Not only the views of Northumberland but also the stunning results of lime mortars and compassionate restoration have a real impact on those carrying out this work. Once more, national firm Bernicia, are proud to be sponsoring the development of these skills, knowing just how high the demand is for such sympathetic work, throughout Northumberland. With related projects earmarked throughout the county, the future promises to be bright as we look forward to an exciting and highly constructive 2025!

MARKET GARDENERS PURSUE RHS CERTIFICATION



Two of our market garden workers are cultivating not just plants, but their futures, as they undertake the RHS Certificate in Principles of Plant Growth and Development through the Prison Education Trust. This Level 2 qualification represents an important first step toward a career in horticulture, combining hands-on experience with professional education.

The Oswin Project is supporting these learners by providing practical experience that complements their studies. While the course covers essential topics like plant structure, nutrition, and health, our market gardens offer the perfect environment to put this knowledge into practice. The 180-hour course includes eight written assignments and two exams, all of which are supported by the Horticultural Correspondence College's tutors.

This qualification is particularly valuable as it opens doors to future employment in the growing horticulture sector, and in the charities 'inside and out' team. As we increasingly focus on green spaces and sustainable food production, the skills our trainees are developing are becoming ever more valuable in the job market.

10TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY



The Oswin Project marked its 10th anniversary with a joyful celebration that brought together the many people who have made our work possible. Funders, staff, volunteers, former staff members, and Oswinners gathered to share stories, cake and celebrate the impact of a decade dedicated to creating second chances.

Looking back over 10 years of creating opportunities and forward to the future, the celebration served as a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared belief in second chances. We thank everyone who has been part of our journey, and look forward to many more years of changing lives.

DOUBLING DOWN ON ROTL

The Oswin Project is breaking new ground in its commitment to rehabilitation, significantly expanding its program that employs prisoners Released On Temporary Licence (ROTL). This growth reflects our dedication to providing meaningful work experiences for individuals on their journey back to society.

For the past two years, we've been creating employment opportunities for ROTLs at Café 16 in Newcastle Cathedral and our Farm Shop. We are thrilled that our program has

grown to include three prisoners from two different prisons working in our Bike Shop and Café 16.

Looking ahead, we're in discussions to bring in ROTLs from a third prison, further diversifying the work experiences we offer and broadening our impact.

These opportunities allow individuals to gain practical work experience, develop new skills, and prepare for reintegration into society. By expanding our program, we are demonstrating the positive impact that second chances can have on both participants and our community. We aim to ensure there are fewer victims of crime and safer communities.

50TH AMBLE FOOD BANK DONATION

The Oswin Project has reached a heartwarming milestone in its community support efforts. We've just completed our 50th donation to Amble Food Bank, a testament to our ongoing dedication to making a positive impact in the local area.

Every week, we gather any unsold or unused produce and baked goods from both our prison bakery and farm shop. Instead of letting these items go to waste, we ensure they reach those in need through Amble Food Bank.

This initiative not only helps combat food insecurity in our area, but also promotes sustainability by reducing waste. It's a win-win situation that embodies the Oswin Project's values of community support and responsible resource management.

We're proud of this achievement and grateful for the opportunity to make a positive impact. Here's to many more donations and continued support for the community!

FIONA SPOKE AT CITY FORUM

Our CEO Fiona Sample spoke in October at Cityforum's Transforming Criminal Justice: People, Prevention, Prisons event at the BT Tower in London. She talked about our work in offering second chances to people with criminal records. Described by one attendee as "powerful, moving and at times shocking" Other speakers included Max Dennehy, Francis Pakes, Penny Parker, Dr Katie Harber and Liz Bridge, Chaired by Karyn McCluskey, this panel explored new ideas to deliver prison reform, with hard-hitting comments from inside the prisons, and from those with lived experience of the system.



DAVID'S STORY

David joined Café 16 in HMP Northumberland and immediately threw himself into the bustle of the kitchen. With previous catering experience, he thrived on the challenge of large breakfast orders on a Friday and ensuring there was organisation, systems and efficiency throughout the week. David enjoyed being part of the 'pleasant atmosphere' in Café 16 and once again working in a team and supporting others.

David's steady, efficient and reliable presence in Café 16 was recognised and this was seen elsewhere in the prison, meaning he could overcome his biggest hurdle and was then able to apply for ROTL (day release). He quickly achieved this and became a key member of the Farm shop team. David impressed the volunteers with his cheery presence and 'brilliant washing of the floor', and they missed him when he started the daily commute to Café 16 in the Cathedral.

The importance of the bridge of opportunity the Oswin Project provides is seen in David's progress. He sees the support the Oswin Project offers as key to this, he finds 'the one-to-one support most valuable,' and it has helped him prepare for his next steps and his 'aim of working full time in Café 16 in the Cathedral'.

CAFÉ 16 BEYOND THE CATHEDRAL



During the last months Café 16's services have been in demand beyond the Cathedral doors. Apart from the usual round of events the team cater for in the Cathedral from the start of the legal year to concerts and carols round the Christmas tree, their food is now in demand further afield.

On 18th September lunch was supplied for the Benefact Group Charity Round Table discussion hosted by Lycetts at Bank House and was very much appreciated. Café 16 catered a lunch for CW Architects. On the evening of 12th December 120 Guests and employees of Royal Haskoning DHV enjoyed a buffet to celebrate the move to their new offices in Strawberry Lane. The guests thoroughly approved of the eats, especially the mushroom parcels. One guest managed to take four at once, saying they were some of the best he had ever tasted!

We are very grateful to all the organisations who use Café 16 for their events. They offer valuable experience for the team and are good publicity for the charity.

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

The Oswin Project would like to thank all its funders for their support and generosity, without them we would not be able to transform lives through mentoring, training and work experience.

- The Alchemy Foundation
- Barbour Foundation
- Bernica
- Bromley Trust
- Charles Hayward Foundation
- Christopher Rowbotham Charitable Trust
- Diana Ashcroft Charitable Trust
- Fryish Foundation
- Garfield Weston Trust
- Hadrian Trust
- Horseman Trust
- Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales
- Northumberland Estates Community Fund
- O'Flaherty Foundation
- Sir James Knott Trust
- Pease Charitable Trust
- Platton Family Trust*
- The Centre for Social Justice
- The Rank Foundation
- The Worshipful Company of Drapers
- The Worshipful Company of Weavers
- Tudor Trust
- Vardy Foundation
- Ventient Sisters & North Shields Windfarm*
- WA Handley
- G S May Family Fund *

* at The Community Foundation, Tyne and Wear Northumberland.

The Oswin Project would also like to thank the many individuals who have made significant donations but wish to remain anonymous, the regular givers, the fund raisers and our volunteers who kindly donate their time and enthusiasm.