

# Hospitality training for prisoners: a second chance?

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Alison McIntosh joined AUT as professor of hospitality and tourism in February 2017. Her research focuses on issues of social justice and advocacy through tourism and hospitality in the pursuit of social change. Her recent work examines accessible travel, and hospitality training and employment for people with disabilities.

Noting rising statistics relating to incarceration and reoffending, there has been increased attention given to analysing the delivery, effectiveness and challenges of hospitality training and employment programmes for rehabilitating prisoners. The stigma of having a criminal record and being unreliable and untrustworthy remains a significant barrier for prisoners in gaining employment. This stigma may be compounded by a prisoner's lack of skills, education, social problems and poor (physical and mental) health. However, there are now an increasing number of prisons around the world offering qualifications in catering, or a hospitality social enterprise such as a jailhouse café; for example, the Verne café and The Clink restaurants in the U.K. Our research sought to fill a gap in understanding about how the public feel about such initiatives, which aim to give prisoners a second chance.

Using the case study of the very successful annual 'Gate to Plate' event in Wellington, our research gained various perspectives on the use of this prison event as a social model of rehabilitation through hospitality training. Specifically, we used thematic analysis [1] to analyse public information sources about the event. Sources included newspaper articles, trade magazines, social media, information taken from the New Zealand Department of Corrections website, independent reviews of the event, and a radio interview with one of the inmates.

Since 2012, local industry chefs and minimum-security prisoner-cooks from Rimutaka prison have teamed together to produce fine dining cuisine for the annual 'Wellington on a Plate' festival – a festival designed to showcase the region's food and beverages. The inmates are usually experienced in cooking and working towards a cooking qualification. During the 'Gate to Plate' event as part of the Wellington festival, Rimutaka prison hosts 160 paying members of the public and more than 60 stakeholders over three nights. After clearing security and a briefing, guests experience a glimpse of 'life inside' and are served a three-course dinner in the Staff Training College followed by a question and answer session with the prisoner-cooks. The event is an innovative way to show the public the work happening to rehabilitate prisoners, and an opportunity to break down the negative stereotypes of offenders.

Our research revealed three common themes in the content of the public information sources we analysed. The themes were: 'breaking the stereotypes'; 'pride and passion to make a difference'; and 'training for rehabilitation'. The



first theme emerged from comments by chefs, journalists and other guests on their change in attitude toward a more positive perception of prisoners as a result of attending the event, suggesting that this type of initiative may enable transformation in terms of social identity. The second theme saw inmates commonly discussing their passion and desire to ‘make a difference’ for themselves; a fresh start. Thus, the passion of volunteering in such an event can provide a sense of new meaning for a new future. The third theme related to common positive reports of the importance of in-prison training and qualifications for rehabilitation.

While this paper makes no claim about the effectiveness of the ‘Gate to Plate’ event as a reforming rehabilitation practice for prisoners, there is mounting evidence worldwide to suggest that in-prison training and post-release employment programmes can successfully assist prisoners to remain custody free post-release (e.g. [2]). As such, we encourage further research to examine how hospitality training and employment may provide a positive opportunity to change lives through enabling a second chance.

This research was presented at the CHME (Council of Hospitality Management Education) conference in May 2019 at the University of Greenwich in England.

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### **References**

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