

Sodexo's Starting Fresh programme wins Social Impact & Diversity award at 2024 Footprint Awards

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Sodexo's Starting Fresh programme which aims to encourage UK businesses to recruit people with convictions has been recognised at the Footprint Awards for sustainability excellence, winning the Social Impact and Diversity award.

Sodexo launched its Starting Fresh initiative in the UK in March 2023 following research¹ it commissioned identifying that 62% of UK private sector businesses were facing recruitment challenges yet a third had not considered hiring people with convictions.

Starting Fresh leverages Sodexo's extensive experience in the sector as an inclusive employer, to advocate for, and provide employment opportunities for, this often overlooked group. It offers free guidance to employers, encouraging more businesses to proactively recruit skilled and qualified people with convictions.

In its first year, Starting Fresh has

- facilitated employer days in prisons, allowing businesses to meet potential employees and learn about their skills and qualifications first hand.
- supported Sodexo's Prison Employment Leads help 700 people to gain sustainable employment upon release from prison with a wide variety of organisations, including Sodexo

- seen Sodexo partner with more than 20 charities and external organisations who all share the common goal of supporting those from prison into employment. These include the government's New Futures Network, The Oswin Project, Clean Sheet and Novus Works.

Tony Simpson, Justice Operations Director, Sodexo UK & Ireland, said: *"We are delighted to have won this award and want to share this recognition with our many partner organisations who work tirelessly alongside us. We truly believe in the transformative power of gainful employment for people with criminal convictions and are keen to drive recognition of the immense value they can bring to both businesses and the communities they serve.*

"Nearly 50,000 people leave prison every year, many emerging with formal qualifications they didn't have before in construction, cleaning, catering, hospitality, hairdressing and many other areas. They are skilled and job-ready, equipped with the skills, qualifications and experience to transition into the workforce.

"The programme continues and since its launch we have created toolkits for Members of Parliament to use within their constituencies as well as one specifically for businesses to help them proactively engage with our prisons and partners to start the hiring process with prison-leavers.

"We firmly believe that employing people with convictions can add great value to a business and we know for a fact that the impact on individuals and their communities is priceless."

The [Starting Fresh online hub](#) provides bespoke content and a raft of resources including FAQs, skills packs, case studies aimed at supporting prison leavers looking for employment and businesses looking to tap into this under-utilised talent pool.

Sodexo has 30 years' experience in managing UK prisons on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and Scottish Prison Service and is committed to rehabilitating offenders and providing opportunities for purposeful activity. Sodexo's employment, education and rehabilitation services give people the support, skills and qualifications they need to lead law-abiding lives in the community on release.

¹ *The research was conducted by Censuswide between 10.01.23 - 17.01.23, with 1,001 owners and senior leaders with hiring responsibilities across British businesses. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.*