

Speech for Court Lunch, May 2nd, Worshipful Company of Butchers

Master, Deputy Master, Distinguished Guests, Liveryman, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an enormous honour to be invited to speak to the Court today, to a room where I find myself amongst some very dear friends and acquaintances who have supported me tirelessly in my previous CEO role at Farms for City Children.

That role brought me into the embrace of the Butchers' Livery; a place that holds deep affection for me having been welcomed into this very special company since 2022.

I come to you today having recently commenced the role as CEO of The Clink Charity – another strategic partner for the livery having worked with the charity at the Guildhall, and at the annual City Food Lecture.

For those of you who are not overly familiar with the work of The Clink, please allow me to offer you some context to our mission. The Clink was founded in 2009 to **prevent** and **reduce** reoffending through training, rehabilitation, and support, creating an environment where our students are supported to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications they need to rebuild their lives.

Since that time, we have trained approximately 5,000 people in prison and delivered 2,600 City & Guilds qualifications in a variety of hospitality and food courses. What makes The Clink so unique, is our post-release support and mentoring programme that rehabilitates an offender back into society through assistance with health and mental health issues, housing, employment, family connections and friendships.

The charity operates award winning fine-dining restaurants open to the public inside HMP Brixton and HMP Styal, training kitchens across the prison estate, horticulture projects at HMP Send and HMP Erlestoke, a commercial bakery in Brixton, and a bespoke delivery service, Catered by Clink, that is ideal for office meetings, lunches and celebrations. Additionally, Clink Events is our social enterprise catering business with food produced by the women in HMP Downview and then served by ex-offender alumni on front of house at some of the best venues in London. In fact, in 2024, across 218 events, The Clink fed 36,000 people.

To help illustrate the scale of the issue we are facing in the UK, there are currently just under 90,000 people incarcerated in prison giving us the highest rate of imprisonment in all of Western Europe. It costs £50,000 a year to keep one adult in prison, and almost £120,000 a year to keep a young person in a young offenders' institute. The annual cost of re-offending stands at almost £20 billion and depressingly, 75% of people will reoffend within nine years of release.

There are other unintended costs of imprisonment beyond just housing the offender. Homelessness and relocation costs, increased social benefits burden, and NHS costs for health and mental health issues. Consider also other social costs, particularly the 320,000 children on average who have a parent locked up, many of whom end up placed in social care without their parent.

42% of all people in prison have previously been excluded from school and 25% of those in custody are care experienced. We have created a graduation route from poor school performance and failed social care straight into the prison estate. Quite simply,

prison is NOT working, and there needs to be reform of the estate and investment in projects that can reduce this cycle of reoffending.

This all sounds so bleak, doesn't it? Not the jolly narrative we want to be hearing at a court lunch. So, what can be done? What interventions can be installed to stop this cycle? To capture the prisoner and move them towards a path of rehabilitation? Where is the hope in all of this chaos? The answer – education, skills, and training.

The Clink is delivering this intervention every day, and it is having a hugely positive impact. ProBono Economics calculates that for every £1 invested, The Clink's integrated training and support programme has the potential to deliver a return of **£4.80** to society.

In 2024, The Clink delivered over 26,400 training hours to vulnerable adults, with almost 800 students attaining 650 NVQ qualifications.

Most notable in our mission to reduce reoffending, is the 159 released students in 2024 who received rehabilitative support and care post-release as they sought to rebuild their lives, with 63% of them being placed into, or working towards employment. The vast number of our graduates join the hospitality industry across all aspects of the food chain, putting their training with The Clink into practice in restaurants, hotels, and public sector catering businesses that many of you in this room will also partner with across the industry.

As 2025 begins, The Clink Charity has responded to requests to move our work into the community in London, partnering with local authorities and the Youth Offending Team to support children and young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system. Youth crime increases on average year-on-year by 9%. That's a devastating statistic.

Our shift into crime prevention has led us to open a training facility, Clink Café, in Herne Hill, South London, to work with minoritised and vulnerable young people facing overwhelming barriers in their lives. With multiple SEND issues to navigate, the young people who are referred to us are also more likely to come from the care system and have been excluded from school and are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Currently, we are caring for young people who have been groomed into gangs and have existing charges pending court date. We have girls who have already been victims of extreme violence and sexual exploitation. We have vulnerable, and socially isolated young people who have locked themselves away since Covid and have been unable to find courses or employment to meet their additional needs.

Our first cohort will graduate on the 9th May having completed a cycle of 5 City and Guilds qualifications with us in just 3 months, as well as a programme of wellbeing support that has seen my team deliver group and one-to-one emotional and behavioural support workshops, an introduction to mentors, employability workshops, CV writing and mock interviews, and a work experience placement in a real kitchen.

Working in partnership with multi-agency teams across Lambeth, we are able to signpost additional services for wrap-around care of the young people to intervene and to change the trajectory of their lives. Our hope is that we will be so successful in

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preventing offending after our course that the local authority will allow us to continue working with the young person back in their community.

The young people have loved their time with us. They have shown courage and commitment. They have been resilient and learned how to work in a team. They have fed customers on the Bessemer estate every day, preparing food and operating the front of house of the Café. They have laughed and cried; felt frustrated and have wanted to give up, but have dug deep, inspired by a new love of food and hospitality.

Our hope is that this experience has taught them that they are worthy of more than they were allowing into their lives three months ago. That they have skills and talents that they did not know they had. They have stickability and they can be mature, consistent and reliable. That have learned that they are highly employable, and that a bright and hopeful future is waiting for them in the food industry.

This intervention rehabilitates. It reintegrates a young person back into the fold of society. The Clink's approach to prevention works. It reduces crime and reoffending, lessening the burden on the prison estate. It improves public safety and builds community resilience. It increases access to educational opportunity, improves employability into an industry currently struggling to recruit, and it enhances the self-esteem and personal agency of the participants of the programme, so they feel more worthy and less likely to choose criminality.

I will leave you with some words from one of our young people graduating next week:

"I didn't know that I could cook. We don't have a place to cook food in the flat that we share, so I had never seen some of the ingredients I have worked with never mind know what to do with them. I didn't think that I would ever be good at anything. I never had a certificate in my life, and now I have 3. Chef tells me that I am bright, and I could do this for a living. I don't want this to end. I don't want to go back to where I was before. There is no hope there. I want my life to mean something. I want to feed people. I like seeing them happy. I think that everyone should get to do something like this."

Thank you so much again Master, for having me here to speak to you today. For your typically warm welcome, to the caterers and sponsors of today's delicious meal, and to you all, my friends, for being the best livery family in the City of London.