

Joe Baden



Founder, Open Book Project
Honorary Fellowship

Joe Baden has turned his own life around and in doing so paved the way for others to escape the cycle of deprivation, addiction and crime, through education.

Born in Southwark, Joe left school at 13 with no formal qualifications, and started work in the print industry. Soon, though, he drifted into crime. This was followed by addiction and mental health problems. By the time he was 30, drugs and alcohol were playing a major part in his life. He had convictions for theft and affray, and had already spent time in prison. It was while on probation that he reluctantly agreed to join a basic skills programme. It reminded him of how much he'd enjoyed writing on the rare occasions he had gone to school, and started thinking about whether education might offer a way out of the cycle of crime and addiction.

He signed up for an access course at Greenwich University. In 1998, he graduated with a BA in History from Goldsmiths College. His first job, working as a tutor with the probation service, brought it home to him both how many ex-prisoners had the potential to go into higher education and how few opportunities were open to them. So he started working on pilot projects with Goldsmiths aimed at encouraging ex-cons to follow in his footsteps. Gradually the projects gathered momentum and in 2002, Open Book was launched. Open Book's aim is to help ex-offenders and those with addiction and mental health problems to get into education by offering both practical and emotional support. The project provides year-round access to mentoring plus drop-in and study sessions. There's also an outreach programme, which includes visits to prisons, hospitals and residential units.

Since 2002, Open Book has successfully recruited and supported over 200 students on courses ranging from foundation to post-graduate level in a vast number of educational institutions. The project can boast more than 50 graduates, none of whom would ever have considered studying before they came into contact with Joe.

Today, Joe is much in demand for his expertise and his outspoken opinions on topics from prison reform to youth offending to how to encourage more working class people to go to the opera. Joe boasts more column inches than any department, academic or student at Goldsmiths College. In 2007 he was given a prestigious Life Changers Award by the University College Union, and, for the last three years, has been voted Staff Member of the Year by Goldsmiths Students' Union.

Since taking those first skeptical steps into the world of education Joe Baden has become a shining light in further and higher education. He truly believes in the work he does, he truly cares about the people he meets – and he truly believes that education is the route to self-fulfillment.