World Justice Project

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

A series of

ASEAN best practices

on Advancing the Rule of Law

By The World Justice Project

Thailand:

The Restart Academy

Acknowledgements

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Alejandro Ponce
World Justice Project
11156 15th St NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005, USA
Email: aponce@worldjusticeproject.org

About the ASEAN Best Practices on Advancing the Rule of Law

The ASEAN Best Practices Initiative is a knowledge-sharing platform that seeks to identify, document, and share successful stories of government-led efforts to advance the rule of law across the ASEAN region. Many effective initiatives have achieved meaningful results but remain little known beyond their national contexts. By bringing these successful stories to a wider audience, the initiative aims to promote peer learning, encourage innovation, and strengthen collaboration among those committed to advancing the rule of law and rules-based regional integration. In this initiative, "best practices" refers to successful and promising approaches that have demonstrated positive results and offer practical lessons for others. Rather than promoting a single model, the initiative seeks to foster the exchange of experience, encourage adaptation to different national contexts, and support continuous learning and improvement across the region.

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Executive Summary

The criminal justice system in Thailand continues to face the dual challenges of prison overcrowding and high rates of recidivism. A large proportion of the country's prison population comprises of individuals convicted of drug-related offenses. This poses particular challenges for correctional facilities and underscores the need for tailored rehabilitation and social reintegration approaches for formerly incarcerated individuals. Despite the criminal justice system's existing vocational training and rehabilitation programs, many formerly incarcerated individuals face difficulties in securing employment and gaining social acceptance after release, increasing the likelihood of reoffending and imposing significant social and economic costs on society.

To address these challenges, the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ) established Restart Academy, a rehabilitation and reintegration program that combines vocational education, employment, and psychosocial support through a schooling and social enterprise model. Building on TIJ's earlier Hygiene Street Food project, Restart Academy was formally launched in 2023 to equip formerly incarcerated individuals with the technical, interpersonal, and social skills necessary to achieve long-term economic independence and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. The Academy uses a "schooling model" in which participants combine classroom instruction with hands-on employment, mentoring, counseling, and peer support. Additionally, its "social enterprise model" further connects rehabilitation with income-generating activities, including Restart Kitchen, catering, salon and spa services, laundry, arboriculture, and other businesses.

The program has reported some promising results. Since its establishment, Restart Academy has trained approximately 100 participants and currently employs 51 participants of the program, with more than 80% of participants reportedly completing the training. Since the program's inception 49 participants have secured employment outside the program (this also includes participants who did not complete the training); 18 have secured external employment, 16 have established their own businesses or are working in family businesses, and 11 are pursuing freelance work.[1] The program also reports low levels of reoffending among its participants: two of the first 40 participants were re-incarcerated, representing a reported 5% recidivism rate in 2025, while the overall rate reported by the program fell to 2% in 2026. These figures compare favorably with Thailand's reported national recidivism rates, particularly during the first years following release.[2] Staff and customers interviewed for the evaluation also described improvements in confidence, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, professionalism, and social acceptance among participants. Together, these findings suggest that combining practical employment with sustained psychosocial and social support can contribute to successful reintegration.

[1] Of the 100 participants, 81 have completed the training provided by the Restart Academy, 2 reoffended and 17 resigned from the program.

[2] In Thailand, recidivism is defined as the return to prison of a person who has been released, either following a new conviction or while being held on remand. Based on available data for people released from prison between 2013 and 2024, Thailand's recidivism rate averaged about 14.5% within the first year after release, 23.3% within two years, and 28.7% within three years. Source: Department of Corrections, Thailand, RECSTATS, http://www.correct.go.th/recstats/index.php/en/home

Other aspects of the model remain promising but are still emerging. Restart Academy's social enterprise approach has demonstrated potential to combine rehabilitation objectives with financial sustainability. In 2025, approximately 74% of its THB 20.97 million in income was generated through its own commercial activities, while the program recorded a modest operational surplus. The Academy is also developing new business opportunities and partnerships that could expand both employment opportunities and revenue. However, its ability to maintain financial sustainability while increasing participant numbers has not yet been fully demonstrated. Expansion has already created occasional cashflow and staffing pressures, and the resource-intensive nature of individualized coaching and mentorship may make the model difficult to scale without additional capacity and diversified funding.

The reported outcome data should also be interpreted cautiously. The low recidivism rates are encouraging but should not, on their own, be interpreted as evidence that Restart Academy causes reductions in reoffending. The program is relatively small, and participants are selected through a voluntary application and screening process, meaning they may differ from the broader population of formerly incarcerated individuals in their motivation, readiness for rehabilitation, or other personal characteristics. In addition, the available evidence provides limited information on longer-term outcomes and does not include a comparable control group. The reported results therefore provide a strong basis for further learning and evaluation, but additional longitudinal monitoring and independent assessment would be valuable to determine the extent to which the model can produce sustained reductions in recidivism at scale.

The evaluation nevertheless identifies several important lessons for Thailand and the wider ASEAN region. First, reintegration is effective when vocational training is embedded within a broader support system that addresses employment, financial security, psychosocial development, and social relationships simultaneously. Second, a social enterprise model can align commercial activity with rehabilitation by creating real-world employment opportunities while generating resources to support program delivery. Third, strong partnerships among correctional institutions, government agencies, employers, civil society, and communities are essential to sustaining pathways from prison to employment and social reintegration. Restart Academy's distinctive value lies in bringing these elements together through a social enterprise model that makes employment part of the rehabilitation process itself and provides a promising framework for developing more people-centered, sustainable, and integrated approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration in Thailand and across ASEAN.

About This Report

How the Report is Organized

This report assesses the Restart Academy model and its potential contribution to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals in Thailand. The report is organized into five main sections:

1. **Background and Project Overview** provides the broader context of recidivism and reintegration in Thailand and describes the origins, objectives, structure, and operating model of Restart Academy.

2. **Key Findings** assess the program across five dimensions: relevance, outcomes and effectiveness, efficiency and resource use, sustainability, and replicability. Together, these sections examine what the program is achieving, the factors that appear to contribute to its results, and the conditions that may affect its future development and application elsewhere.

3. **Lessons Learned** draws out the broader insights emerging from the assessment, focusing on the integration of vocational training and holistic support, the social enterprise model, organizational adaptability, and institutional partnerships.

4. **Recommendations** identify practical actions for Restart Academy to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, financial sustainability, and strategic partnerships, followed by recommendations for ASEAN governments and justice-sector institutions seeking to strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration systems.

5. **Conclusion** synthesizes the principal findings and considers the broader significance of Restart Academy as a promising model for more people-centered justice approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Methodology and Evidence Base

This report utilizes the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Program Evaluation Framework to present and assess Restart Academy's best practices and areas for improvement. Best practice here does not mean perfect practice. Rather, it reflects a government initiative that has been developed with a clear aim and strategic direction to improve and address a rule of law issue. WJP has adapted the OECD Program Evaluation Framework to assess the Restart Academy initiative through the following dimensions:

- **Relevance**: how well the initiative addresses a rule of law gap
- **Effectiveness**: to what extent are desired outcomes achieved
- **Efficiency**: resource use in achieving results
- **Sustainability**: whether the initiative can be maintained and expand
- **Replicability**: potential for adaptation in other ASEAN countries

The assessment draws on a combination of Restart Academy program data, financial and operational information, and qualitative interviews with program participants, former participants, staff, and other relevant stakeholders. Quantitative information provided by the program was used to examine participation, completion, employment, and recidivism rates, and financial performance, while interviews provided additional insight into participants' experiences, behavioral changes, social reintegration, and perceptions of the program. Information on the Academy's organizational structure, partnerships, and future plans was also considered in assessing its sustainability and potential for replication.

The assessment is intended primarily as a qualitative and exploratory assessment of an emerging model, rather than a formal impact evaluation. Several limitations should therefore be considered when interpreting the findings. The program has operated at a relatively small scale, and participants are voluntarily recruited and screened, meaning they may differ from the broader population of formerly incarcerated individuals. The assessment does not include a control or comparison group and therefore cannot establish a causal relationship between participation in Restart Academy and reduced recidivism. In addition, some outcome figures are based on program-reported data and longer-term participant outcomes remain limited. Financial and operational information similarly reflects the program's current stage of development and may change as the Academy expands.

Accordingly, the findings should be understood as evidence of promising practice rather than definitive evidence of program impact. The reported outcomes provide a strong basis for identifying lessons and areas for further investigation, while continued monitoring, longer-term follow-up, and more systematic evaluation will be important to determine whether the model can sustain its results and be effectively scaled or adapted to other contexts.

Background and Project Overview

Context

According to results from the *WJP Rule of Law Index® 2026,* Thailand struggles with its criminal justice system. Out of the Index's eight factors measuring the rule of law, Thailand earned its lowest score in Factor 8: Criminal Justice for the ninth consecutive year in 2026.[3] At the indicator level, Thailand's performance in this factor varies. While the country has seen relative success with judicial independence and integrity, the sub-factor measuring the effectiveness of the correctional system consistently scores poorly—not only is this area Thailand's weakest dimension of criminal justice, but it is also one of the country's lowest-scoring indicators out of all 44 sub-factors on the rule of law.[4]

Upon closer examination of this finding, it is clear that Thailand's criminal justice system faces persistent challenges in reducing recidivism and supporting the successful social reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society. On average, individuals with repeat offenses have comprised around 42% of the prison population since 2021; in 2026, this group made up 43% of Thailand's prison population.[5] Of the 175,000 prisoners released in 2024, almost 20% had committed a repeat offense within one year.[6] This cycle of recidivism generates significant social and economic costs for the Thai government—in 2025, the Department of Corrections was allocated more than 17 billion baht (US$546 million)—accounting for 59% of the total budget allocated to the Ministry of Justice of Thailand.[7]

Thailand's high rates of recidivism can be attributed in part to a vicious cycle of drug-related crimes, overburdened corrections facilities, and under-resourced reintegration programs. Individuals convicted of drug-related offenses represent a significant majority of Thailand's prison population, placing the prison system under considerable pressure.[8] As prisons struggle to accommodate larger inmate populations, the resources available for rehabilitation programs are increasingly limited. Despite the Thai government's efforts to introduce legislative reforms, in-prison rehabilitation programs, and post-release support mechanisms, many formerly incarcerated individuals complete their sentences without gaining the practical skills, meaningful employment opportunities, or social support necessary to transition back into society.

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[3] World Justice Project, *WJP Rule of Law Index 2026.* Retrieved from: https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2026/Thailand/

[4] Thailand's scores for Factor 8 (Criminal Justice) sub-factors: *8.3 Correctional system is effective in reducing criminal behavior (0.27), 8.5 Criminal system is free of corruption (0.57), and 8.6 Criminal system is free of improper government influence (0.55.*) Retrieved from: https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2026/Thailand/Criminal%20Justice/

[5] Department of Corrections, Recidivism Statistics Database, 2026. Accessed on September 10, 2026. Retrieved from: http://www.correct.go.th/rt103pdf/report_result_rt103.php?date=01-09-2026

[6] Department of Corrections, Recidivism Statistics Database. Accessed on September 16, 2026. Retrieved from: http://www.correct.go.th/recstats/index.php/en/home

[7] Budget Bureau, Thailand's Budget in Fiscal Year 2025, 93. Accessed on July 13, 2026. Retrieved from: https://bbstore.bb.go.th/cms/1723795161_6532.pdf

[8] As of December 2025, around 70% of total prison population in Thailand is comprised of inmates incarcerated on drug-related offenses, as per data from the Department of Corrections.

These reintegration challenges are exacerbated by discrimination in the labor market, legal barriers to certain professions, and weakened family and community ties, resulting in conditions that force individuals to return to their old criminal networks for financial security and community. Moreover, Thailand has relatively few halfway houses (approximately 130 across five regions) that can provide a structured and healthy living environment for individuals transitioning out of prison life.[9] With little recourse, these challenges often leave formerly incarcerated individuals vulnerable to familiar criminal networks and illicit activities. Beyond the significant financial costs to the correctional system, recidivism perpetuates cycles of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization. Therefore, to reduce reoffending, improve reintegration outcomes, and strengthen the country's criminal justice system, myriad critical contributing factors to high recidivism must be addressed.

[9] Chokprajakchat, Srisombat, Wanaporn Techagaisiyavanit, and Tongyai Iyavarakul. "How a halfway house became a road toward freedom: a case study of the Kalatapae community." Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice 7, no. 4 (2021): 318-334.



About the Project

In 2023, the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ), a public organization affiliated with the Ministry of Justice of Thailand, developed the Restart Academy, a rehabilitation and reintegration initiative designed to support formerly incarcerated individuals in building sustainable livelihoods and reconnecting with society. The initiative seeks to reduce recidivism by improving participants' practical skills, creating stable employment opportunities, strengthening life and psychosocial skills, and providing ongoing support during the transition from prison to community life.

Recognizing that the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals depends on more than simply avoiding repeat offenses, Restart Academy's programming prioritizes human capital development. The initiative adopts a "schooling model" that combines classroom instruction, practical workplace experience, mentorship, and peer-to-peer learning. Participants receive vocational training alongside life-skills development, including financial literacy, mental well-being, relationship management, and personal responsibility. Counseling and reintegration support further help participants reconnect with their families and communities. By addressing both the economic and social factors associated with reoffending, the project aims to break the cycle of recidivism and promote long-term reintegration.

Success is not only about staying out of prison, but also about rebuilding one's life and contributing meaningfully to society.

Restart Academy therefore supports reintegration across key dimensions such as financial literacy and money management, future planning and goal setting, positive social relationships, community engagement and social responsibility. Together, these indicators reflect a broader view of reintegration: success is not only about staying out of prison, but also about rebuilding one's life and contributing meaningfully to society.

The initiative excels in linking vocational training directly to employment opportunities. In January 2023, TIJ launched Restart Kitchen, a practical training and employment space where participants gain hands-on experience while earning an income. Trainees rotate across food

stalls to develop a broad range of culinary skills and learn from established restaurant partners. The project has since expanded into catering services and additional business ventures.

As of mid-2026, Restart Academy operates through three integrated components that incorporate all the workstreams mentioned above: Restart-Coaching, which provides vocational and psychosocial training; Restart-Career, which creates employment opportunities through project-operated enterprises, particularly Restart Kitchen; and Restart-Money, an emergency financial assistance fund. Training programs include culinary arts, hairdressing, salon services, traditional Thai massage, arboriculture, laundry services, construction, and applied arts.

Restart Academy by the Numbers

~100 participants trained since the program's establishment	**51** participants currently employed by the program	**80%+** of participants reportedly completed the training
49 participants secured employment outside the program	**2%** reported recidivism rate in 2026 (5% in 2025)	**74%** of THB 20.97 million in 2025 income generated by the program's own commercial activities

Key Findings

Relevance

Thailand's high rates of recidivism highlight the country's urgent need for multidisciplinary programming that addresses the structural gaps that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from successful reintegration. Within this context, Restart Academy's programming demonstrates its relevance through its comprehensive view of the rehabilitation process. However, much of the program's success may be attributed to its selective roster of participants: by narrowing its focus to a small selection of highly vulnerable participants, Restart Academy is able to offer individualized, targeted interventions within a supportive communal environment. The relevance of this program design is therefore dependent on its scalability, as it remains to be seen whether this intensive approach could be applied to prisons with larger inmate populations.

These points are examined in detail below:

- **Multidimensional support.** Instead of solely focusing on vocational training or job placements, Restart Academy addresses the challenge of reoffending through a multidimensional package of support that combines training with employment opportunities, financial support, psychosocial counselling, life-skills development and a supportive community environment. This integrated approach follows a people-centered justice model that recognizes rehabilitation as a process that extends beyond prison release and into sustainable efforts to reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals into society by addressing both the economic and social drivers of recidivism.

- **Targeted participant selection.** Restart Academy's participants are required to undergo an extensive screening and interview process, and those selected for participation are invited to join the program on a voluntary basis. In contrast to conventional prison-based rehabilitation programs, the selective nature of Restart Academy's recruitment practices ensures that the individuals most vulnerable to reoffending are prioritized for participation. This design feature also allows Restart Academy to focus its programming on a limited number of participants, which reinforces the program's supportive community environment and enables a more tailored experience for each participant. While this strategy is effective in smaller cohorts, it is unclear whether prisons would be able to replicate these methods in rehabilitation programs for larger populations.

- **Limited scale.** While Restart Academy has achieved undeniable successes, the relevance and impact of the program is limited by its current scale—by design, the program only reaches a marginal selection of the formerly incarcerated population. The extent to which this model can be expanded to benefit a much larger population of formerly incarcerated individuals will depend on the effective replication of Restart Academy's intensive coaching, mentorship, and individualized support that underpins the program's success. Consequently, the broader relevance of the program also lies in informing future reforms for post-release reintegration policy, both in Thailand and the ASEAN region.

Outcomes and Effectiveness

The Restart Academy has demonstrated promising early outcomes in reducing recidivism by improving social reintegration and ensuring financial security for its participants. Among the program's first 40 participants, only two individuals reoffended, corresponding to a reported 5% recidivism rate in 2025, compared to Thailand's national average of approximately 14.5% within the first year of release.[10] The program has trained a total of 100 participants since its inception, and as of January 2026, its overall recidivism rate has dropped to 2%.[11] Around 80% of participants complete the program, remain engaged in the program for 8-12 months, and as many as half of those continue working within the Restart Academy, while others choose to transition to external employment or pursue self-employment.[12]

The initiative contributes to workforce development by supplying skilled labor to sectors with high labor demand, particularly in Thailand's service and tourism industries.

Beyond participant-level outcomes, the initiative has broader implications for Thailand's criminal justice system and its economy. By contributing to a reduction in recidivism, initiatives such as Restart Academy have the potential to alleviate pressures on an overcrowded prison system, enabling greater public investment in rehabilitation and the management of higher-risk offenders. At the same time, the initiative contributes to workforce development by supplying skilled labor to sectors with high labor demand, particularly in Thailand's service and tourism industries.

The effectiveness of a number of critical components of the program contribute to this promising result:

- **Comprehensive skill development.** Restart Academy follows a developmental "schooling-model" that integrates classroom instruction, practical work experience, counseling, and life-skills development. This integrated approach recognizes that a combination of factors (including economic insecurity, weak social support, lack of technical skills, and behavioral challenges) contribute to recidivism, and that any successful rehabilitation program must address such challenges comprehensively to support long-term success: for example, vulnerable individuals will struggle to maintain steady employment if they are unable to navigate interpersonal issues as they arise. Of the program's 49 graduates, 18 have secured employment, 16 have transitioned into self-employment (either by starting their own businesses or working in family businesses), 11 are engaged in freelance work, and one participant is engaged in religious activities (the program could not provide information on the remaining three graduates' employment status).[13] These outcomes show that a combination of

[10] Thailand Institute of Justice, Restart Academy Program Evaluation Document 2025

[11] Thailand Institute of Justice, Restart Academy Participant Program Completion Document. Of the 2 participants who reoffended, one was initially convicted in a drug-related offense, and the other for theft.

[12] Interview with Dr. Anuwan Vongpichet, Deputy Executive Director of Thailand Institute of Justice, June 17, 2026.

[13] Thailand Institute of Justice, Restart Academy Data on Graduates and Jobs.

technical skills with sustained holistic support can improve participants' capacity to reintegrate successfully.

- **Stable, livable income and employment**. Restart Academy reduces the economic pressures that frequently contribute to reoffending by providing its participants a monthly stipend of 15,000 THB (approx. US$ 450) to meet their immediate living expenses while completing training. By combining financial support with structured skills development in sectors facing labor shortages or those vital for the Thai economy, the program creates realistic pathways for meaningful employment for the participants. 49 graduates of the program have moved onto securing employment outside the Restart Academy program. This demonstrates that the Restart model can develop transferable skills that improve participants' long-term job prospects rather than creating dependence on employment within the Academy.

- **Focus on behavioral change**. Interviews with current and former participants consistently highlighted improvements in confidence, emotional regulation, patience, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, many participants reported that the sense of social acceptance and belonging they developed through the program serve as strong deterrents to a return to criminal activity.[14] These social skills were also noted by customers of Restart Kitchen, who also reported positive perceptions of participants' professionalism, openness to feedback, and quality customer service.[15] Such evidence shows that the initiative contributes to reducing stigma and strengthening social reintegration, both of which are widely recognized as important determinants of successful rehabilitation for the program's participants.

Many participants reported that the sense of social acceptance and belonging they developed through the program serve as strong deterrents to a return to criminal activity.

[14] Interview with former participants of Restart Academy program, May 18, 2026.
[15] Interview with Restart Kitchen customer, May 19, 2026.

Efficiency and Resource Use

Restart Academy's social enterprise model allows the program to operate efficiently. By combining commercial business management with social objectives, the program creates stronger incentives for innovation, accountability, and ownership than approaches that rely primarily on government administration or charitable service delivery. Initial observations suggest that this has contributed to a strong focus on achieving both social outcomes and sound financial performance. While the Academy continues to benefit from government support, revenue generated through its business activities now accounts for around three-quarters of its total income.

Restart Academy's encouraging progress towards financial sustainability and reduced dependence on public funding is examined further in the points below:

- **Revenue from business programming.** The program has demonstrated its ability to leverage commercial operations to finance the rehabilitation of program participants. Rather than depending solely on vocational training to foster social reintegration, the participants develop their skills while working in operational businesses, including Restart Kitchen, catering services, salon and spa, arboriculture, and laundry services. In 2025, Restart Academy generated THB 20.97 million (approx. USD$ 630,000) in total income against THB 20.02 million (approx. USD$ 600,000) in expenditures, resulting in an operational surplus of 5% of total income.[16] Approximately 74% of income (THB 15.46 million) was generated through the Academy's own businesses (with the greatest gains coming from the food court and catering business), and the remaining through a combination of private donors and government support. This financial structure shows that commercial activities can counterweigh program costs while also serving as practical learning environments for participants.

- **Financial investment in participants.** The program allocates a substantial share of its resources towards participant development outcomes rather than overhead costs. Restart Academy's average annual programming cost per active participant is approximately THB 400,333 (approx. USD$ 12,000), while monthly stipends of THB 15,000 for participants account for approximately 27% of total expenditure, reflecting the program's resource-intensive nature and emphasis on supporting participants' transition back into society through direct investment. Partnerships with commercial entities further strengthen the resource base of the program through the provision of technical expertise, employment pathways, and practical training opportunities.

[16] Restart Academy, Annual Financial Report 2025.

- **Path to sustainable growth.** While the program has demonstrated an effective use of resources thus far, the continuation of this efficiency will require addressing both financial and human resource constraints as the program expands. Because the program avoids turning away motivated applicants from participating, Restart Academy has at times accepted a number of participants beyond its operational capacity; this practice has placed some financial strain on the program in the form of delayed payroll and cashflow problems.[17] In terms of human resources, Restart Academy is constrained by its dependence on trainers who possess both technical expertise and the ability to support participants through complex behavioral and social transitions. As Restart Academy expands its programming to reach larger audiences, a more diversified funding approach must be adopted to scale the program's operational capacity and staffing needs. Without a comprehensive strategy to tackle such issues, there is a risk that program quality and the intensive support that is foundational to participants' rehabilitation outcomes will be adversely impacted.

[17] Interview with Restart Academy Staff, May 18, 2026.

Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of the Restart Academy model will depend on its ability to maintain financial viability, institutional capacity, and high-quality participant support as it expands. Its current model provides a strong foundation, but scaling will require these elements to grow together:

- **Diversification of income streams**. Approximately 74% of Restart Academy's income is generated through its own commercial operations owing to an efficiently run operation and loyal customer base and has demonstrated substantial progress towards reducing reliance on government and donor funding. The program's plans to scale its operations by opening new food court locations by partnering with organizations offering rent-free spaces, growing its catering operations by engaging with Thailand's growing events industry, and plans to expand restaurant operations to new locations like the Chaengwattana Government Complex all demonstrate a sound understanding of what can be done to diversify income streams. However, expansion will also increase costs for stipends, trainers, mentors, and business operations. The model will therefore remain sustainable only if revenue growth is sufficiently aligned with the cost of expanding participant capacity without compromising the quality of rehabilitation support.

- **Expanded institutional capacity**. Restart Academy trains and hires its participants under the Good Start for Society Company limited, an independent entity with clearly defined leadership responsibilities spanning commercial operations, social impact, education and finance. TIJ provides strategic oversight and external advisors are also engaged which has created a strong governance structure with potential for continuity. This organizational arrangement also provides a degree of operational freedom and separates day-to-day program management from strategic oversight. As the program expands, the Academy will need to strengthen staffing, management systems, financial planning, and monitoring capacity to ensure that growth does not outpace its ability to provide individualized support and maintain effective governance.

- **Strategic, formalized partnerships.** Restart Academy has demonstrated its ability to cultivate strong partnerships with and garner institutional support from both the public and private sectors—its ongoing collaboration with the Department of Corrections, local businesses and entrepreneurs, and civil society organizations provide a credible source of financial and technical resources as well as key employment pathways for participants. For these relationships to support the program's long-term sustainability, they will need to become increasingly systematic and institutionalized rather than dependent on individual relationships or short-term collaborations.

The program's sustainability will depend on preserving its core rehabilitative functions as it becomes larger and more commercially oriented.

- **Maintaining programmatic integrity at scale**. The program's sustainability will depend on preserving its core rehabilitative functions as it becomes larger and more commercially oriented. The social enterprise model is a key strength precisely because commercial activity and rehabilitation are mutually reinforcing; businesses generate income while providing participants with practical training and employment opportunities. Rapid expansion could nevertheless create pressure to prioritize revenue generation over individualized support for all participants. The central sustainability challenge is therefore not simply whether Restart Academy can become financially self-sufficient, but whether it can scale its revenue, organizational capacity, and institutional partnerships without diluting the intensive rehabilitation approach that underpins the early positive outcomes.

Replicability

Given the Restart Academy's relatively small-scale and resource-intensive model, complete replication may not be feasible across all contexts. However, the model provides transferable principles that can inform the design and execution of reintegration programs in other jurisdictions. Consequently, replication should focus less on reproducing Restart Academy's specific activities, and more on determining which core principles and program elements are crucial to its effectiveness, which can be adapted, and which enabling conditions must be established first for successful replication.

Any attempt to apply Restart Academy's model to new contexts should consider the following points:

- **A multifaceted approach is essential**. Restart Academy's success is primarily driven by its integration of vocational training, practical employment, life-skills development, and individualized reintegration support within a single program. This approach addresses multiple drivers of recidivism, including lack of marketable skills, unemployment, financial insecurity, and lack of community support, rather than treating employment as a standalone solution. The social enterprise model is particularly relevant because it combines skills development with actual employment experience and generates income that can support program delivery and provide participants subsistence. These principles can be adapted to any context, regardless of the suitability of the specific business activities featured in Restart Academy's model.

- **Project activities should be adapted to local economic and institutional conditions**. Restart Academy's businesses reflect opportunities specific to Thailand's labor market, including food services, hospitality, massage, hairdressing, etc. Other jurisdictions would need to identify sectors with sufficient labor demand and develop partnerships with capable employers willing to provide training and access to employment opportunities. Similarly, the levels of involvement between government agencies, private employers, civil society organizations, and social enterprises can be adjusted according to available institutional capacity and resources in other contexts. Replication should therefore preserve the function of each component such as skills development, income generation, employment placement, and social support, rather than its specific form.

Employer and community acceptance can determine whether participants are able to translate training into meaningful employment and reintegration.

- **Organizational culture and social attitudes affect results.** While core principles and certain operational features can serve as inspirations for replication; several enabling conditions may be more difficult to replicate. Restart Academy's ability to achieve early positive outcomes were in part dependent on committed programmatic leadership, specialized staff, sustained government support, private-sector engagement, and an organizational culture willing to work constructively towards rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. Social attitudes are extremely relevant to rehabilitative programs: employer and community acceptance can determine whether participants are able to translate training into meaningful employment and reintegration. In other contexts, the willingness of private employers and customers to conduct business with formerly incarcerated individuals may vary, and social stigma may create barriers to successful reintegration within certain communities. Replication may therefore require complementary efforts to build public awareness, encourage second-chance employment, and address legal restrictions on access to certain occupations.

- **Build upon existing rehabilitative institutions.** Perhaps the most relevant policy lesson for ASEAN governments may be to apply the program's principles through existing correctional and reintegration systems rather than attempting to reproduce the Restart Academy as a standalone project. Aspects of the program, such as the integrated post-release support, employer engagement, individual support and use of the social enterprise model to finance rehabilitation, can be incorporated into existing correctional, probation, and community reintegration programs in other jurisdictions. Stronger institutional linkages can also create pathways from pre-release preparation to post-release employment and support.

Lessons Learned

1. Successful reintegration is more likely when vocational training is integrated within a comprehensive support system.
The evaluation found that participants did not just gain vocational training, they also gained hands-on experience with employment while developing social skills and financial literacy. The participants were also part of a supportive community that encouraged personal growth and accountability. Rather than having isolated interventions for the different components that aid successful reintegration, the program provided a safe space where participants could rely on a trusted community. This integrated approach enables participants to develop practical skills while building their interpersonal and social skills to return to their communities, find acceptance, and become productive members of society.

2. A social enterprise model can successfully combine commercial activity and rehabilitation objectives while maintaining a focus on participant outcomes.
The social enterprise model provides participants with structured employment, opportunities to develop practical workplace skills, and real-world work experience while also generating income to support themselves and program operations. Instead of viewing profitability and rehabilitation as competing priorities, the program integrates the two goals through business activities that give participants work experience while simultaneously financing the program. Maintaining balance between the commercial and rehabilitation objectives will also remain integral to Restart Academy's success as this enterprise grows and seeks to expand.

3. Experience-informed adaptability is a key contributor to program development and success.
Throughout its first three years of operation, Restart Academy continuously refined its programmatic processes and methods to address emerging challenges and improve participant outcomes. The program demonstrates an ability to learn from experience, incorporate feedback, and adjust practices as new problems and opportunities arise. This flexibility has strengthened the program's ability to address participant needs while maintaining focus on the main objective: rehabilitation and social reintegration.

4. Strong institutional partnerships are central to program implementation.
Collaboration with correctional institutions, probation services, private employers, and civil society organizations enables Restart Academy to support participants across multiple stages of the rehabilitation process. These partnerships facilitate participants' referrals, create opportunities for employment and skills development, and help provide continuity of support beyond completion of the program. By using the expertise and resources of multiple stakeholders, rehabilitation programs can address participants' diverse needs more effectively.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Restart Academy

1. Develop robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems.
Restart Academy should continue strengthening its monitoring and evaluation framework by systematically tracking long-term participant outcomes such as employment, income stability, program completion, and recidivism rates. A stronger evidence base, supported where possible through collaboration with the Department of Corrections and other relevant agencies, will improve organizational learning, demonstrate impact, and provide greater confidence for future investment and replication.

2. Create a phased financial sustainability strategy.
Restart Academy has made encouraging progress towards financial sustainability, with commercial income now accounting for approximately 74% of its total revenue. As the program expands, it should develop a phased business strategy that identifies priority sectors for growth, realistic financial targets, and a clear timeline for reducing dependence on government funding while preserving its rehabilitation mission and quality of support.

3. Formalize strategic partnerships to support long-term growth.
As the program continues to grow, Restart Academy should further strengthen its strategic partnerships with government agencies, private employers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. Deeper collaboration will support participant referrals, employment opportunities, organizational learning, and long-term institutional sustainability while reinforcing the program's role within Thailand's broader rehabilitation and reintegration system.

Recommendations for ASEAN Governments and Justice Sector Institutions

1. Integrate holistic reintegration approaches into correctional and probation systems.
Restart Academy demonstrates that successful reintegration requires more than vocational training alone. ASEAN governments should consider incorporating holistic reintegration approaches, including employment support, life-skills development, mentoring, financial literacy, and community support, into existing correctional, probation, and post-release programs to better address the multiple factors contributing to reoffending.

2. Strengthen cross-sector partnerships for successful reintegration.
Reducing reoffending requires coordinated action beyond the correctional system. Governments should strengthen partnerships among correctional agencies, probation services, local authorities, employers, civil society organizations, and community groups to improve referral pathways, expand employment opportunities, and provide more coordinated support for formerly incarcerated individuals during their reintegration into society.

3. Review legal, policy, and social barriers to reintegration.
ASEAN governments should review legal, administrative, and social barriers that unnecessarily limit employment opportunities and social acceptance for formerly incarcerated individuals. At the same time, greater public awareness of successful rehabilitation stories can help reduce stigma, encourage employer participation, and foster broader community support for reintegration, contributing to lower rates of reoffending over the longer term.

4. Promote social acceptance through public engagement.
Governments should complement legal and policy reforms with initiatives that foster greater public acceptance of formerly incarcerated individuals. Public awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives—such as Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project, which has inspired similar efforts in Thailand—can help reduce stigma, encourage employers to provide second chances, and strengthen community support for successful reintegration.



Conclusion

Restart Academy demonstrates that successful reintegration requires far more than vocational training alone. Its strength lies in combining employment opportunities, life-skills development, mentoring, financial literacy, and community acceptance within a single, integrated rehabilitation model that addresses the underlying drivers of reoffending. The program also illustrates how a social enterprise approach can combine commercial activities with social objectives, providing both practical work experience and a pathway towards greater financial sustainability.

While the model continues to evolve and faces challenges related to long-term sustainability, institutional capacity, and future expansion, it offers valuable lessons for policymakers and practitioners across the ASEAN region. Rather than presenting a blueprint to be replicated in its entirety, Restart Academy provides a promising framework whose underlying principles can be adapted to different national contexts. Its greatest contribution may ultimately lie not only in transforming the lives of the participants it directly serves, but also in informing broader efforts to build more people-centered, evidence-based, and inclusive approaches to rehabilitation and social reintegration throughout the region.