

March 2016 **AFFECT** **NEWS BULLETIN**

From the Chair

As always we are looking for new volunteers and to fill new roles. If you, or anybody else you know, may be interested in becoming a volunteer with AFFECT please do contact us via email affect01@hotmail.com

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The AGM will be on 9th July.
Invitations will be sent out in due course. Please attend if you can.

Til death us do part.

Eloise found herself outside Greystone Prison walls for the second time in a week, with the predictable "visiting day" wind and rain adding to the gloom. As she looked up at the towering dark grey walls, with their endless circles of steel and barbed wire, she held her son's hand even tighter. There were faceless officers in black shirts, trousers and army style bover boots. Their belts held various weapons attached in case a visitor gave them any trouble. Standing next to one of them was a feisty sniffer dog in disguise as mans' best friend. He was there to weed out any contraband the "enemy", also known as the "visitor", might try to smuggle into the establishment. These hostile and indifferent men were all powerful and commanded respect, just because they could. Surely her life had not come to this; it was so surreal she almost had to pinch herself.

After a time Jimmy tried to run into the waiting room to play with the other children and the hand me down toys; however there was always a sequence that had to be followed on a visit. She had to join the queue and get her number before he was allowed to play with the others. The female officer at the desk was misery personified and never looked up as she gave out the precious golden tickets; this was a passport to the other side for Eloise into another world where her other half, Tom, was now residing "at her majesty's pleasure". Officers with chains and jangling keys looked at her and the boy suspiciously with contempt on their eyes. She stepped up to the desk, took her ticket and saw she had the magic

number 9. She tried to engage the unsympathetic officer with a smile but there was no point as she didn't even look her way.

Eloise let go of Jimmy's hand and he ran towards the play area with his eyes focused on the ramshackle play house. He was instantly lost in an innocent child's world. He did not understand what was going on and anyway he had no need. A long wait of at least two hours was ahead so she found a seat nearby and picked up a jaded copy of "Woman's World". The room was filling up with more visitors and the noise levels were starting to break through her thoughts. She desperately tried to fight the high pitched shrieks of the other wives—how did they find it so easy to laugh in a place like this? Her mind was swirling round and round like a whirlpool and her head soon ached with thoughts of how she was going to feel when she saw Tom. Little Jimmy was aware he was going to see his Dad and quite happy to accept the conditions that were put on the relationship as long as she remained a constant. It was beyond her darkest nightmare and her heart felt it was being squeezed lifeless little by little. Her eyes began to fill up and she had to bite her lip to stop the floods gates opening.

Jimmy, on the other hand, was in raptures as he played with the toy cooker, bashing the pots and pans around, adding to the ever present noise that was taking over the room. Opposite sat a woman in her fifties who was looking at her with what seemed like understanding in her crinkly eyes. **To be continued.**

A tribute to Stephen

Nearly ten months ago there was a day that changed my life forever. It was a story that started 23 years ago at a party; girl meets boy. Little did we know it would end up here as a story in this news letter. On that day when he was sentenced I was in utter shock and disbelief. It was like the world had ended. My heart could have stopped beating my chest and I probably would have been quite grateful. I could not comprehend how it had come to that point. Someone that I had known for such a long time in such a desperate situation. In the early days I struggled to hang on to my sanity. I am the very proud mother of two amazing children but I didn't

understand the world around me and how I would cope with what had happened. I seriously had moments when ending things seemed to be the best option. I never ever thought I could feel that way, but I did. Once the fog cleared a little I tried to pull myself together but exactly a month later my son was taken into hospital, seriously ill with a lifelong condition. I genuinely have no idea how I got through.

I discovered Stephen through one of many internet searches for support for families of prisoners. We seem to be the forgotten ones. The ones who didn't commit any crime but pay the price all the same. We worry for them, try to support them as all the research says a supportive network is the best chance of rehabilitation and yet at the same time we are also condemned by their crime. This isn't a journey for the faint hearted, that's for sure. Slowly over time, after putting one foot in front of the other and taking each day, one by one, I found my way. I'm not saying it's been easy at all. As I write this I'm suffering from a serious dose of missing him. That will not change. I have simply become used to it, accustomed to this path. And it's ultimately my choice to support him. Life will not be easy when he comes home. There are many challenges ahead once he's finished his time inside. But I can guarantee you one thing. I will be with him, standing by his side. And beside me will be Stephen, the calming understanding voice that has guided me through my many ups and downs over the last few months and no doubt will continue to do so as this journey continues.

As you read this, just know one thing, you are not alone. All the feelings that go with this journey are as real and bare as they feel, but there are people who do understand. I hope to give back to Stephen in time, when our HMP journey is over, to pay it forward to those who need the comforting words and lack of judgement that Stephen gives me. It's is truly priceless and I will forever be in his debt, although I'm completely sure that he will protest at that comment!

LATEST ART THERAPY

STRESS BUSTING CRAZE

Adult colouring books-Give it a try

A mindful & relaxing activity

Mine is 'Tropical Wonderland'

by Millie Marotta. £3.99 on Amazon.

'The best exercise: reach down

& pull someone up'

This may strike a chord with some of you. "Making a Murderer" This moving serial is about Stephen Avery who was twice wrongly convicted for rape and murder. It's on Netflix.

GROUP GATHERINGS

be held at 12.30 on: Saturday: 05/03/2016,
04/06/2016, 02/09/2016, 02/12/2016

If you would like to come please contact us .These gatherings are well worth attending as you will meet people who all have loved ones facing long periods in prison. you will be able to speak freely ,if you wish, in a secure environment to others who understand something of what you are going through.

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The AGM will be on 9th July. Please attend if you can. You will need to contact us by one of the means below for details.

From the editor.

I would like to thank everyone who has sent such interesting pieces for the bulletin. If you have any comments or anything you would like included in the next newsletter please contact us below. It would be helpful if you could limit yourself to about 500 words!

The views expressed in this newsletter are the writer's opinions and are not necessarily those of the editor or of AFFECT.

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