



Sharing news and support for families

Action
For
Families
Enduring
Criminal
Trauma

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Impact of Covid-19 on Prison, Prisoners, and their Families

our next

GROUP

GATHERING*

* This will probably be by Zoom. If you would like to attend, please reply to your invitation and you will be given details.

These gatherings are well worth attending as you will meet other people who all have loved ones facing long periods in prison and you can talk in a safe place.

The Prison Reform Trust has looked at the issue of Covid-19 and its effect on families, and found it has had a 'massive impact' on prisons and prisoners.

According to the Ministry of Justice, Covid cases in prisons rose from zero in late March, to almost 1,000 by early June. Conditions for some are 'inexcusable', owing to over-crowding and a decaying estate. *Since March 2020, a national lock-down has caused most prisoners to be confined to cells for 'up to' 23.5 hours a day, no visits, and limited access to open air.* Some prisons have used social media to maintain links between prisoners and families, but this is hindered by the ban on internet access for prisoners.

PRT is very concerned that as restrictions in the wider society are relaxed, prisons are lagging behind, leading to mental health harm caused by extended and extreme confinement.

PRT staff are back at work following furlough. Use of 'Email a Prisoner' has increased. They have set up a **freephone** 24 hour voicemail service on which can be left a short message for information or update on a case. **0808 802 0060.**

PRT has set up a new project 'CAPPTIVE' (Covid Action Prison Project: Tracking Innovation, Valuing Experience). It focuses on sharing best practice, while highlighting and eliminating bad practice. They urgently seek contributions to this rapid review, via ppn@prisonreformtrust.org.uk or 020 7251 5070.

Family Story in Time of Covid

Our son, who suffers from autism, has been locked up for 23.5 hours a day since March. We have not been able to visit him throughout that time; we can only contact him by letter. This is impacting on our son's mental health and well-being, and on our own. The main problem is that communication from the prison is non-existent, and there appears to be a lack of staff and resources. We are very worried, but unable to ascertain for ourselves how things are progressing for him. The situation feels totally out of control.

Anon. September 2020

Group Gathering

As you are no doubt aware, AFFECT has been unable to hold a family support group (Group Gathering) for the past 6 months. A member has suggested that we hold a Group Gathering by Zoom (internet meeting). We welcome your views. If you would find this helpful, please contact Carol on 07833 458415 or affect01@hotmail.com.

Thought for the Day

No matter how hopeless the present problem may seem, remember; This, too shall pass.

Recent changes to Covid Prison Lock-down

Shortly before going to press, we have received a Notice from the Director General of Prisons, sent to Prisoners' Families in regards to the Covid Prison Lockdown. The points raised are, in summary:

- easing of restrictions, and running more activities
- increase in visiting, with social distancing, wearing of masks, and extra deep-cleaning
- more video calls
- shielding of vulnerable prisoners to continue
- importance and maintenance of low levels of infection
- importance of family support
- information provided via Prison Radio
- reinforcing the importance of emotional support to family members

The full notice is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/her-majestys-prison-and-probation-service>

Thanks to everyone who has sent articles and information for the Newsletter. We are always welcome your suggestions for content, and if you'd like to share your story (or part of it), we would love to hear from you as the "Stories" are always very popular. Any contributions will appear with your first name only, or will be anonymous if you prefer.

Please note the views expressed in this newsletter are those of the writer and are not necessarily those of the editor or of AFFECT

