



Supporting Families and Friends of Prisoners

Action
For
Families
Enduring
Criminal
Trauma

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AFFECT News

Sharing News and Supporting Families June 2022

Notes from the Chair

Dear Ones,

Summer is (nearly?) here, and with the sun, roses, flowers, dawn chorus etc, our spirits can rise, even in the most difficult times. As you may remember, AFFECT was successful in securing the second year of Lottery funding, with a 50% increase on last year. With these funds, new Telephone Support Workers have been recruited- welcome Becky, Josh and Lindley- and the service is being widely promoted with a specially designed flyer. This is going to Prison Visitors Centres, GP surgeries, libraries, Citizens' Advice offices, etc. If you think you can help distribute some, let me know by contacting AFFECT on 0300 365 3651, with your postal address, and the number of flyers you want.

Emma, the part-time Project Worker has been busy with a number of projects, mainly liaising and developing links with Volunteer Bureaux. She is also seeking to develop links with the Law Faculty at the local University, so that AFFECT has its own legal advice. Emma was also responsible for developing the flyer and will take over the Newsletter.

Maintaining supervision for Telephone Support Workers is currently presenting a challenge for AFFECT, and to that end we are negotiating with one of experienced trained counsellors to run a trial from October to December, on a paid basis. Thank-you Kathy for giving this some consideration.

We have received many requests that at a Group Gathering the issue of mental health and tips for survival are addressed. So far we have been unable to secure a mental health practitioner who can lead us on this session. If you have any ideas or contacts, please let us know.

I hope you have a good summer, and whatever the particular circumstances you are in, you are able to enjoy nature's gifts to us at this time of year.

Love,

Carol

Next Group Gathering

Will be held on Saturday the 9th of July at 1pm via Zoom. To join in please reply to this invite by email: affect@hotmail.com or by calling us on 0300 365 3651 and we will give you the details you need to join the meeting.

This is a great opportunity to meet people going through similar experiences to you, and to talk in a safe and welcoming environment.

'My world fell apart': life in prison with a serious mental illness

This article is an interesting insight into how someone who needed medical help found themselves in prison and includes a prison officer's opinion. A warning before reading, it does contain talk of suicide, self-harm and loss of a partner and child. You can access the article at <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/may/10/my-world-fell-apart-life-in-prison-with-serious-mental-illness> or by emailing affect01@hotmail.com

Research Participants Wanted

Sözeri Şahin is conducting a research project titled 'Partnership and Desistance: The Other Half of the Issue'. They are looking for people over the age of 18 who are a current or previous UK resident who have been in a relationship with someone who has been in prison at some point in their life. During the relationship they must have cohabited with this person for at least six months and the partner must have been male.

The aim of this research is to understand how being in a relationship impacts previously or currently incarcerated individual's possibility of reoffending. They want to know your perspective on how your partner's conviction impacted you, your partner, and your relationship.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Sözeri Şahin on sozeri.sahin@kellogg.ox.ac.uk or by phone on +447899322894. It would involve an interview that would last roughly one hour which can be online via Microsoft Teams, or in person if you live in England.

Lockdown Story -1

While inside my partner is saying things are still bit by bit returning to 'normal' I live in fear this will never happen. While he is no longer locked up 22 – 23 hours a day, a situation that he endured with a balanced attitude I cried over every day feeling his pain. I can only admire and wonder at his strength. But I guess he was inside with all enduring this while I was outside alone dealing with the mental anguish of him inside unvaccinated in a fearsome situation if the virus took hold. I know I could never have endured what he did for well over a year.

Now visits are allowed alternate weekends back to three adults and alternate Wednesdays and Thursdays of same week. I can now alternate with the family, I get to see him once a month, rather than once every two or three months. still not enough, if the visit weekend clashes with other family events such as Father's Day I must choose.

To me the pandemic is not over and restrictions while they remain continue to add to my mental anguish. I wonder what member of the powers that be can say they must make such choices in life.

Lockdown Story 2

It has been hard to watch my family member struggle on his own to cope with Covid lockdown, and difficult to provide the sort of support he needs. I fear his mental health may have deteriorated – Carol

Story 3

Another of our trust board described a phone call with her son who said they are still being locked up at 5pm rather than 6:30pm like they had previously been. Visitor numbers are still restricted to 12 when they had previously been around 40 which is something that will be about for a while to come. Some positives she described were the gym being reopened recently, work returning to normal, and prisoners from different wings being allowed to mix.

AFFECT maintains confidentiality at all times, but has permission to share this story:

While working for the charity Affect, I often hear upsetting stories from families of loved ones in prison. The impact covid had on prison life was truly unbearable for some. With prison suicide rates increasing and on occasions prisoners unable to access medication or counselling due to various prison rules. Loved ones of prisoners were often left feeling helpless- *Kathy, volunteer support worker.*

Story 4

One of my clients tells me her son was in his cell for 23.5 hours a day throughout covid. His precious 30 mins outside his cell would consist of a shower, doing his washing and making a phone call home. The lack of rehabilitation and socialisation had a huge impact on his mental health. She witnessed her son's morale plummet, and she became increasingly aware of his suicidal tendencies. She felt the system had swallowed her son up with no rehabilitation or education on offer, then seemed to spit him out into society and expect him to cope and not reoffend.

When a prisoner caught covid they were locked in their cells for 8-10 days with their cell mate. Meals were eaten in the cells and there was no access to showers and clean clothes. This impact filtered down onto the connected family members who suddenly found themselves within a telephone counselling role. They experienced direct emotional pressure due to the lack of resources their loved ones could access inside. This obviously had a detrimental effect on the family's mental well-being.

Since coming out of prison my client informs me that her son is struggling with the immense transition in his life. Working routine, socialising and general life skills have all been an uphill struggle. There had been no inside preparation for such things. While she agreed he needed consequences for his actions, she had hoped prison life may have been a time for self-reflection and growth. Instead, it appears to have robbed him of any self-worth he may have previously had. As a society it's in everyone's best interest that our young people are given every opportunity to improve on themselves. Let's stop deskilling individuals and provide them with new skills a society can benefit from. Such programs are in place on paper, but from what my clients tell me, it seems that their loved ones are being denied access to them. We may see crime rates rise over the next few years, which could possibly be directly linked to the covid period, in which the system increasingly neglected an opportunity to educate and support our prisoners.